





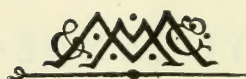
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YOLANDE



YOLANDE

The Story of a Daughter

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' 'A PRINCESS OF THULE,' ETC.

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TO

JAMES PAYN

*THIS STORY IS DEDICATED BY ONE OF
HIS MANY FRIENDS.*

LONDON, 1883.

1800631

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YOLANDE.

CHAPTER I.

RELEASED FROM CHÂTEAU COLD FLOORS.

LATE one evening in April, in a private sitting-room on the first floor of an hotel in Albemarle Street, a member of the British House of Commons was lying back in an easy-chair, having just begun to read, in an afternoon journal, an article about himself. He was a man approaching fifty, with what the Scotch call "a salt-water face"—that is to say, a face tanned and reddened with wind and weather; sharp of feature, and with hair become prematurely quite silver-white. At a first glance he seemed to have the air of an imperative, eager, aggressive person; but that impression was modified when by any accident you met his eyes, which were nervous, shrinking, and uncertain. Walking in the street, he rarely saw any one; perhaps he was too preoccupied with public affairs; perhaps he was sensitively afraid of not being able to recognise half-remembered faces. When sitting alone, slight noises made him start.

This was what the man with the thin red face and the silver-white hair was reading:—

"By his amendment of last night, which, as every one anticipated, was defeated by an overwhelming majority, the member for Slagpool has once more called attention to the unique position which he occupies in contemporary politics. Consistent only in his hopeless inconsistency, and only to be reckoned on for the wholly unexpected, one wonders for what particular purpose the electors of Slagpool ever thought of

sending Mr. Winterbourne to Parliament, unless, indeed, it were to make sure that their town should be sufficiently often heard of in the councils of the nation. A politician who is at once a furious Jingo in foreign affairs and an ultra-revolutionary at home ; an upholder of the divine rights and liberties of the multitude, who, at the same time, would, if he could, force them to close every public-house in the country, alike on Sunday and Saturday ; a virulent opponent of Vivisection, who nevertheless champions the Game Laws, and who is doubtful about the abolition of Capital Punishment, probably because he would like to reserve to himself the right of hanging poachers : it may be conceded that such a member of Parliament, if he is not to be counted on by any party, or by any section or sub-section of any party—if, indeed, he is ordinarily a good deal more dangerous to his allies than to his enemies—may at least do some service to his constituents by continually reminding the country of their existence, while ministering on the same occasions to his own inordinate vanity. For it is to this—it is to an inordinate vanity, spurred on by an irritable and capricious temper, that we must look for the cause of those spasmodic championships and petulant antagonisms, those erratic appearances and disappearances, those sudden alliances and incomprehensible desertions, which have made of the member for Slagpool the very whirligig and teetotum of modern English politics.”

When he had got thus far he stopped.

“It sounds like the writing of a young man,” he was thinking. “But perhaps it is true. Perhaps that is what I am like. The public press is a mirror. I wonder if that is how I appear to Yolande?”

He heard a footstep outside, and immediately thrust away the newspaper from him, face downward. The next moment the door of the room was opened, and the framework of the door became the framework of a living picture. Mr. Winterbourne’s face lightened up with pleasure.

The picture framed by the doorway was that of a young girl of eighteen, singularly tall and strikingly fair, who stood there hesitating, timid, half-laughing.

“Look,” she said. “Is it your idea?”

‘*Is it your idea!*’ he repeated, peevishly. “Yolande, you

are getting worse and worse, instead of better. Why don't you say, 'Is this what you meant?'"

"Is this what you meant?" she said, promptly, and with a slight foreign accent.

His eyes could not dwell on her for two seconds together, and be vexed.

"Come to the mirror, child, and put on your hat, and let me see the whole thing properly."

She did as she was bid, stepping over to the fireplace, and standing before the old-fashioned mirror, as she adjusted the wide-brimmed Rubens hat over the ruddy gold of her hair. For this was an experiment in costume; and it had some suggestion of novelty. The plain gown was of a uniform cream-white—of some rough towel-like substance that seemed to cling naturally to the tall and graceful figure; and it was touched here and there with black velvet; and the tight sleeves had black velvet cuffs; while the white Rubens hat had also a band of black velvet round the bold sweep of the brim. For the rest, she wore no ornaments but a thick silver necklace round her throat and a plain silver belt round her waist, the belt being a broad zone of solid metal, untouched by any graver.

But any one who had seen this young English girl standing there, her arms uplifted, her hands busy with her hat, would not have wasted much attention on the details of her costume. Her face was interesting, even at an age when gentleness and sweetness are about the only characteristics that one expects to meet with. And although no mere catalogue of her features—the calm, clear brow; the wide-apart, gray-blue eyes; the aquiline nose, the unusually short upper lip and beautifully rounded chin; her soft and wavy hair glistening in its ruddy gold; and her complexion, that was in reality excessively fair, only that an abundance of freckles, as well as the natural rose-colour of youth in her cheeks, spoke of her not being much afraid of the sun and of the country air—although no mere enumeration of these things is at all likely to explain the unnameable grace that attracted people to her, yet there was at least one expression of her face that could be accounted for. That unusually short upper lip, that has been noted above, gave a slight pensive droop to the mouth whenever her features were in repose; so that, when

she suddenly looked up, with her wide, wondering, timid, and yet trustful eyes, there was something pathetic and wistful there. It was an expression absolutely without intention ; it was inexplicable and also winning ; it seemed to convey a sort of involuntary unconscious appeal for gentleness and friendship, but beyond that it had no significance whatsoever. It had nothing to do with any sorrow, suffered or foreshadowed. So far the girl's existence had been passed among the roses and lilies of life ; the only serious grievance she had ever known was the winter coldness of the floors in the so-called château in Brittany where she had been educated. And now she was emancipated from the discipline of the Château Cold Floors, as she had named the place ; and the world was fair around her ; and every day was a day of gladness to her, from the first "Good-morning !" over the breakfast-table to the very last of all the last and lingering "Good-nights !" that had to be said before she would let her father go down to put in an appearance at the House.

This must be admitted about Yolande Winterbourne, however, that she had two very distinct manners. With her friends and intimates she was playful, careless, and not without a touch of humorous wilfulness ; but with strangers, and especially with strangers abroad, she could assume in the most astonishing fashion the extreme coldness and courtesy of an English Miss. Remember, she was tall, fair, and English-looking ; that (when all the pretty, timid trustfulness and merriment was out of them) her eyes were wide apart, and clear and contemplative ; and further, that the good dames of the Château Cold Floors had instructed her as to how she should behave when she went travelling with her father—which happened pretty often. At the *table d'hôte*, with her father present, she was as light-hearted, as talkative, as pleasant, as any one could wish. In the music-room after dinner, or on the deck of a steamer, or anywhere, with her father by accident absent, she was the English Miss out-and-out, and no aside conversations were possible. "So proud—so reserved, so English," thought many an impressionable young foreigner, who had been charmed with the bright, variable, vivacious face as it had regarded him across the white table-cover and the flowers. Yolande's face could become very calm—even austere on occasion.

"Is it what you meant?" she repeated, turning to him from the mirror. Her face was bright enough now.

"Oh yes," said he, rather reluctantly. "I—I thought it would suit you. But you see, Yolande—you see—it is very pretty—but for London—to drive in the Park—in London—wouldn't it be a little conspicuous?"

Her eyes were filled with astonishment; his rather wandered away nervously to the table.

"But, Papa, I don't understand you! Everywhere else you are always wishing me to wear the brightest and lightest of colours. I may wear what I please—and that is only to please you, that is what I care about only—anywhere else—if we are going for a walk along the Lung' Arno, or if we go for a drive in the Prater—yes, and at Oatlands Park, too, I cannot please you with enough bright colours; but here, in London, the once or twice of my visits——"

"Do speak English, Yolande," said he, sharply. "Don't hurry so."

"The once or twice I am in London, oh no! Everything is too conspicuous! Is it the smoke, papa? And this time I was so anxious to please you—all your own ideas; not mine at all. But what do I care?" She tossed the Rubens hat on to the couch that was near. "Come! What is there about a dress? It will do for some other place, not so dark and smoky as London. Come—sit down, papa—you do not wish to go away to the House yet! You have not finished about Godfrey of Bouillon."

"I am not going to read any more Gibbon to you to-night, Yolande," said he; but he sat down all the same, in the easy-chair, and she placed herself on the hearthrug before him, so that the soft, ruddy gold of her hair just touched his knees. It was a pretty head to stroke.

"Oh, do you think I am so anxious about Gibbon, then?" she said, lightly, as she settled herself into a comfortable position. "No. Not at all. I do not want any more Gibbon. I want you. And you said this morning there would be nothing but stupidity in the House to-night."

"Well, now, Miss Inveigler, just listen to this," said he, laying hold of her by both her small ears. "Don't you think it prudent of me to show up as often as I can in the House—

especially when there is a chance of a division—so that my good friends in Slagpool mayn't begin to grumble about my being away so frequently? And why am I away? Why do I neglect my duties? Why do I let the British Empire glide on to its doom? Why, but that I may take a wretched school-girl—a wretched, small-brained, impertinent, prattling school-girl—for her holidays; and show her things she can't understand; and plough through museums and picture-galleries to fill a mind that is no better than a sieve? Just think of it. The British Empire going headlong to the mischief all for the sake of an empty-headed schoolgirl?"

"Do you know, papa, I am very glad to hear that?" she said, quietly.

"Glad, are you?"

"Yes," said she, nestling closer to him, "for now I think my dream will soon be coming true."

"Your dream?"

"My dream. The ambition of my life," said she, seriously. "It is all I wish for and hope for. Nothing else—nothing else in the world."

"Bless us all!" said he, with a touch of irony. "What wonderful ambition is this?"

"It is to make myself indispensable to you," she said, simply.

"He took his hands from her ears and put them on her hair, for there were some bits of curls and semi-ringlets about her neck that wanted smoothing.

"You are not indispensable, then?" said he.

"Listen now, papa; it is your turn," she said. "Surely it is a shame that you have wasted so much time on me, through so many years—always coming to see me and take me away—perhaps not a week between—and I glad enough, for it was always expectation and expectation—and my things always ready—and you, poor papa, wasting all your time, and always on the route, and that such a long way to Rennes. Even at Oatlands Park the same—up and down—up and down by rail—and then long beautiful days that were very good to me, but were stupid to you, when you were thinking of the House all the time. Very well, now, papà; I have more sense now; I have been thinking; I want to be indispensable to you; I want to be in London with you—always; and you shall never

have to run away idling, either to the Continent or to Oatlands Park ; and you shall never have to think that I am wearying for you—when I am always with you in London. That is it now ; that I wish to be your private secretary.”

Her demand once made, she turned up her face to him ; he averted his eyes.

“No, no, Yolande,” he said, hastily—and even nervously. “London won’t do for you—it—it wouldn’t do at all. Don’t think of it even.”

“Papa,” said she, “what other member of Parliament, with so much business as you have, is without a private secretary ? Why should you answer all those letters yourself ? For me, I will learn politics very quickly ; I am studying hard ; at the château I translated all your speeches into Italian, for exercises. And just to think that you have never allowed me to hear you speak in the House ! When I come to London—yes, for five minutes or half-an-hour at a time—the ladies whom I see will not believe that I have never once been in the—the what is it called ?—for the ladies to listen in the House ? No, they cannot believe it. They know all the speakers ; they have heard all the great men ; they spend the whole of the evening there, and have many come to see them—all in politics. Well, you see, papa, what a burden it would be taking off your hands. You would not always have to come home and dine with me, and waste so much of the evening in reading to me ;—no, I should be at the House, listening to you, and understanding everything. Then all the day here, busy with your letters. Oh, I assure you I would make prettier compliments to your constituents than you could think of ; I would make all the people of Slagpool who write to you think you were the very best member they could choose. And then—then I should be indispensable to you.”

“You are indispensable to me, Yolande. You are my life. What else do I care for ?” he said, hurriedly.

“You will pardon me, papa, if I say it is foolish. Oh, to think now ! One’s life is more important than that, when you have the country to guard.”

“They seem to think there,” said he, with a sardonic smile, and he glanced at the newspaper, “that the country would be better off without me.”

It was too late to recall this unfortunate speech. He had thrust aside the newspaper as she entered, dreading that by accident she might see the article and be wounded by it; but now there was no help for it; the moment he had spoken she reached over and took up the journal, and found her father's name staring her in the face.

"Is it true, Yolande?" said he, with a laugh. "Is that what I am like?"

As she read, Yolande tried at first to be grandly indifferent—even contemptuous. Was it for her, who wished to be of assistance to her father, in public affairs, to mind what was said about him in a leading article? And then, in spite of herself, tears slowly rose and filled the soft gray-blue eyes—though she kept her head down, vainly trying to hide them. And then mortification at her weakness made her angry; and she crushed up the paper twice and thrice, and hurled it into the fire; nay, she seized hold of the poker and thrust and drove the offending journal into the very heart of the coals. And then she rose, proud and indignant (but with her eyes a little wet), and with a toss of her pretty head she said—

"It is enough time to waste over such folly. Perhaps the poor man has to support a family; but he need not write such stupidity as that. Now, papa, what shall I play for you?"

She was going to the piano. But he had risen also.

"No, no, Yolande. I must be off to the House. There is just a chance of a division; and perhaps I may be able to get in a few words somewhere, just to show the Slagpool people that I am not careering about the Continent with my schoolgirl. No, no; I will see you safe in your own room, Yolande; and your lamp lit, and everything snug: then—Good-night!"

"Already?" she said, with a great disappointment in her face. "Already?"

"Child, child, the affairs of this mighty Empire——"

"What do I care about the Empire!" she said.

He stood and regarded her calmly.

"You are a nice sort of person to wish to be private secretary to a member of Parliament."

"Oh, but if you will only sit down for five minutes, papa," she said piteously, "I could explain such a lot to you——"

"Oh yes, I know. I know very well. About the temper Madame was in when the curls fell out of her box."

"Papa, it is you who make me frivolous. I wish to be serious——"

"I am going Yolande."

She interposed.

"No. Not until you say, 'I love you.'"

"I love you."

"And I forgive you."

"And I forgive you."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"And I may go out to-morrow morning as early as ever I like, to buy some flowers for the breakfast-table?"

But this was hard to grant.

"I don't like your going out by yourself, Yolande," said he rather hesitatingly. "You can order flowers. You can ring and tell the waiter——"

"The waiter!" she exclaimed. "What am I of use for then, if it is a waiter who will choose flowers for your breakfast-table, papa? It is not far to Covent Garden."

"Take Jane with you, then."

"Oh yes."

So that was settled; and he went upstairs with her to see that her little silver reading-lamp was properly lit; and then he bade her the real last good-night. When he returned to the sitting-room for his hat and coat there was a pleased and contented look on his face.

"Poor Yolande!" he was thinking; "she is more shut up here than in the country; but she will soon have the liberty of Oatlands Park again."

He had just put on his coat and hat, and was giving a last look round the room to see if there was anything he ought to take with him, when there was a loud, sharp crash at the window. A hundred splinters of glass fell on to the floor; a stone rolled over and over to the fireplace. He seemed bewildered only for a second; and perhaps it was the startling sound that had made his face grow suddenly of a deadly pallor; the next second—noiselessly and quickly—he had stolen from the room, and was hurriedly descending the stair to the hall of the hotel.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW BEHIND.

THE head waiter was in the hall, alone, and staring out through the glass door. When he heard some one behind him, he turned quickly, and there was a vague alarm in his face.

"The——the lady, sir, has been here again."

Mr. Winterbourne paid no heed to him ; passed him hastily, and went out. The lamp-light showed a figure standing there on the pavement—the figure of a tall woman, dark and pale, who had a strange, dazed look in her eyes.

"I thought I'd bring you out !" she said, tauntingly, and with a slight laugh.

"What do you want ?" he said, quickly, and under his breath. "Have you no shame, woman ! Come away. Tell me what you want !"

"You know what I want," she said, sullenly. "I want no more lies." Then an angrier light blazed up in the impassive, emaciated face. "Who has driven me to it, if I have to break a window ? I want no more lies and hidings. I want you to keep your promise ; and if I have to break every window in the House of Commons, I will let everybody know. Whose fault is it ?"

But her anger seemed to die away as rapidly as it had arisen. A dull, vague, absent look returned to her face.

"It is not my fault."

"What madness have you got hold of now !" he said, in the same low and nervous voice—and all his anxiety seemed to be to get her away from the hotel.

"Come along and tell me what you want. You want me to keep my promise—to you, in this condition ?"

"It is not my fault," she repeated, in a listless kind of way ; and now she was quite obediently and peaceably following him ; and he was walking towards Piccadilly, his head bent down.

"I suppose I can guess who sent you," he said, watching her narrowly. "I suppose it was not for nothing you came to make an exhibition of yourself in the public streets. They asked you to go and get some money ?"

This seemed to put a new idea into her head ; perhaps that had been his intent.

"Yes. I will take them some money, if you like, she said, absently. "They are my only friends now—my only friends. They have been kind to me—they don't cheat me with lies and promises—they don't put me off, and turn me away when I ask for them. Yes, I will take them some money."

And then she laughed—a short triumphant laugh.

"I discovered the way to bring some one out!" she said—apparently to herself.

By this time they had reached the corner of Piccadilly, and, as a four-wheeled cab happened to be passing, he stopped it, and himself opened the door. She made no remonstrance ; she seemed ready to do anything he wished.

"Here is some money. I will pay the driver."

She got into the cab quite submissively ; and the man was given the address, and paid. Then the vehicle was driven off ; and he was left standing on the pavement, still somewhat bewildered, and not conscious how his hands were trembling.

He stood uncertain only for a second or so ; then he walked rapidly back to the hotel.

"Has Miss Winterbourne's maid gone to bed yet?" he asked of the landlady.

"Oh no, sir ; I should think not, sir ;" the buxom person answered : she did not observe that his face was pale and his eyes nervous.

"Will you please tell her, then, that we shall be going down to Oatlands Park again to-morrow morning? She must have everything ready ; but she is not to disturb Miss Winterbourne to-night."

"Very well, sir."

Then he went into the coffee-room, and found the head waiter.

"Look here," said he (with his eyes averted), "I suppose you can get a man to put in a pane of glass in the window of our sitting-room—the first thing in the morning? There has been some accident, I suppose. You can have it done before Miss Winterbourne comes down, I mean?"

He slipped a sovereign into the waiter's hand.

"I think so, sir. Oh yes, sir."

"You must try to have it done before Miss Winterbourne comes down."

He stood for a moment, apparently listening if there was any sound upstairs; and then he opened the door again and went out. Very slowly he walked away through the lamp-lit streets, seeing absolutely nothing of the passers-by, or of the rattling cabs and carriages; and although he bent his steps Westminster-wards, it was certainly not the affairs of the nation that had hold of his mind. Rather he was thinking of that beautiful fair young life—that young life so carefully and tenderly cherished and guarded, and all unconscious of this terrible black shadow behind it. The irony of it! It was this very night that Yolande had chosen to reveal to him her secret hopes and ambition; she was to be always with him; she was to be "indispensable;" the days of her banishment were to be now left behind; and these two, father and daughter, were to be inseparable companions henceforth and for ever. And his reply? As he walked along the half-deserted pavements, anxiously revolving many things, and dreaming many dreams about what the future might have in store for her, and regarding the trouble and terrible care that haunted his own life, the final summing-up of all his doubts and fears resolved itself into this—If only Yolande were married! The irony of it! She had besought him out of her love for him, and out of her gratitude for his watchful and unceasing care of her, that she should be admitted into a closer companionship; that she should become his constant attendant and associate and friend; and his answer was to propose to hand her over to another guardianship altogether—the guardianship of a stranger. If only Yolande were married!

The light was burning on the clock-tower, and so he knew the House was still sitting; but he had no longer any intention of joining in any debate that might be going forward. When he passed into the House (and more than ever he seemed to wish to avoid the eyes of strangers) it was to seek out his friend, John Shortlands, whose rough common sense and blunt counsel had before now stood him in good stead, and served to brace up his unstrung nerves. The tall, corpulent, big-headed ironmaster—who also represented a northern constituency—he at length found in the smoking-room, with

two or three companions, who were seated round a small table, and busy with cigars and brandy and soda. Winterbourne touched his friend lightly on the shoulder.

"Can you come outside for a minute?"

"All right."

It was a beautiful, clear, mild night; and seated on the benches on the Terrace there were several groups of people—among them two or three ladies, who had, no doubt, been glad to leave the stuffy Chamber to have tea or lemonade brought them in the open, the while they chatted with their friends and regarded the silent, dark river and the lights of the Embankment and Westminster Bridge. As Winterbourne passed them, he could not but think of Yolande's complaint that she had never even once been in the House of Commons. These were, no doubt, the daughters or wives or sisters of members: why should not Yolande also be sitting there? It would have been pleasant for him to come out and talk to her—pleasanter than listening to a dull debate. Would Yolande have wondered at the strange night-picture—the broad black river, all quivering with golden reflections; the lights on the bridge; the shadowy grandeur of this great building reaching far overhead into the star-lit skies? Others were there; why not she?

The Terrace of the House of Commons is at night a somewhat dusky promenade—when there does not happen to be moonlight; but John Shortlands had sharp eyes; and he instantly guessed from his friend's manner that something had happened.

"More trouble?" said he, regarding him.

"Yes," said the other. "Well, I don't mind—I don't mind, as far as I am concerned. It is no new thing."

But he sighed, in spite of his resigned way of speech.

"I have told you all along, Winterbourne, that you brought it on yourself. You should ha' taken the bull by the horns——"

"It is too late to talk of it—never mind that now," he said, impatiently. "It is about Yolande I want to speak to you."

"Yes?"

Then he hesitated. In fact, his lip trembled for the briefest part of a second.

"You won't guess what I am anxious for now," he said, with a sort of uncertain laugh. "You wouldn't guess it in a month, Shortlands. I am anxious to see Yolande married."

"Faith, that needn't trouble you," said the big ironmaster, bluntly. "There'll be no difficulty about that. Yolande has grown into a thundering handsome girl. And they say," he added jocosely, "that her father is pretty well off."

They were walking up and down slowly; Mr. Winterbourne's face absent and hopeless at times, at times almost piteous, and again lightening up as he thought of some brighter future for his daughter.

"She cannot remain longer at any school," he said, at length, "and I don't like leaving her by herself at Oatlands Park or any similar place. Poor child! Do you know what her own plans are? She wants to be my private secretary. She wants to share the life that I have been leading all these years——"

"And so she might have done, my good fellow, if there had been any common sense among the lot o' ye——"

"It is too late to speak of that now," the other repeated, with a sort of nervous fretfulness. "But indeed it is hard on the poor girl. She seems to have been thinking seriously about it. And she and I have been pretty close companions, one way or another, of late years.——Well, if I could only see her safely married and settled—perhaps living in the country, where I could run down for a day or so—her name not mine—perhaps with a young family to occupy her and make her happy—well, then, I think I should be able to put up with the loss of my private secretary. I wonder what she will say when I propose it. She will be disappointed—perhaps she will think I don't care for her—when there is just not another creature in the world I do care for—she may think it cruel and unnatural——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, man. Of course a girl like Yolande will get married. Your private secretary! How long would it last? Does she look like the sort of girl who ought to be smothered up in correspondence or listening to debates? And if you're in such a mighty hurry to get rid of her—if you want to get her married at once, I'll tell you a safe and sure way—send her for a voyage on board a P. and O. steamer."

But this was just somewhat too blunt; and Yolande's father said, angrily—

"I don't want to get rid of her. And I am not likely to send her anywhere; hitherto we have travelled together—and we have found it answer well enough, I can tell you. Yolande isn't a bale of goods to be disposed of to the first bidder. If it comes to that, perhaps she will not marry any one."

"Perhaps," said the other, calmly.

"I don't know that I may not throw Slagpool over and quit the country altogether," he exclaimed, with a momentary recklessness. "Why shouldn't I? Yolande is fond of travelling. She has been four times across the Atlantic now. She is the best companion I know: I tell you I don't know a better companion. And I am sick of the way they're going on here." (He nodded in the direction of the House.) "Government? They don't govern; they talk. A Parliamentary victory is all they think about; and the country going to the mischief all the time. No matter, if they get their majority; and if they can pose before the world as the most moral and exemplary Government that ever existed. I wonder they don't give up Gibraltar to Spain; and hand over Malta to Italy; and then they ought to let Ireland go, because she wants to go; and certainly they ought to yield up India, for India was stolen; and then they might reduce the Army and the Navy, to set an example of disarmament; so that at last the world might see a spectacle!—a nation permitted to exist by other nations because of its uprightness and its noble sentiments. Well, that has nothing to do with Yolande; except that I think she and I could get on very well even if we left England to pursue its course of high morality. We could look on—and laugh, as the rest of the world are doing."

"My dear fellow," said Shortlands, who had listened to all this high treason with calmness; "you could no more get on without the excitement of worrying the Government than without meat and drink. What would it come to? You would be in Colorado, let us say; and some young fellow in Denver, come in from the plains, would suddenly discover that Yolande would be an adorning feature for his ranche; and she would discover that he was the handsomest young

gentleman she ever saw ; and then where would you be ? You wouldn't be much good at a ranche. The morning papers would look tremendous empty without the usual protest against the honourable member for Slagpool so grossly misrepresenting the action of the Government. My good fellow, we can't do without you in the House ; we might as well try to do without the Speaker."

For a few seconds they walked up and down in silence ; at last Winterbourne said with a sigh—

"Well, I don't know what may happen ; but in the meantime I think I shall take Yolande away for another long trip somewhere——"

"Again ? Already ?"

"I don't care where ; but the moment I find myself on the deck of a ship, and Yolande beside me, then I feel as if all care had dropped away from me. I feel safe ; I can breathe freely. Oh, by the way ! I meant to ask if you knew anything of a Colonel Graham ? You have been so often to Scotland shooting. I thought you might know."

"But there are so many Grahams——"

"Inverstroy, I think, is the name of his place."

"Oh, *that* Graham. Yes, I should think so—a lucky beggar. Inverstroy fell plump into his hands some three or four years ago—quite unexpectedly—one of the finest estates in Inverness-shire. I don't think India will see him again."

"His wife seems a nice sort of woman ?" said Mr. Winterbourne, with the slightest touch of interrogation.

"I don't know her. She is his second wife. She is a daughter of Lord Lynn."

"They are down at Oatlands just now. Yolande has made their acquaintance, and they have been very kind to her. Well, this Colonel Graham was saying the other evening that he felt as though he had been long enough in the old country, and would like to take a P. and O. trip as far as Malta, or Suez, or Aden, just to renew his acquaintance with the old route. In fact, they proposed that Yolande and I should join them."

"The very thing !" said John Shortlands, facetiously. "What did I say ? A P. and O. voyage will marry off anybody who is willing to marry."

"I meant nothing of the kind," said the other, somewhat

out of temper: "Yolande may not marry at all. If I went with these friends of hers it would not be 'to get rid of her,' as you say."

"My dear fellow, don't quarrel with me," said his friend, with more consideration than was habitual with him. "I really understand your position very well. You wish to see Yolande married and settled in life and removed from—from certain possibilities. But you don't like the sacrifice; and I don't wonder at that; I admit it will be rather rough on you. But it is the way of the world; other people's daughters get married. Indeed, Winterbourne, I think it would be better for both of you. You would have less anxiety. And I hope she'll find a young fellow who is worthy of her; for she is a thundering good girl, that's what I think; and whoever he is he'll get a prize—though I don't imagine you will be over well disposed towards him, old chap."

"If Yolande is happy, that will be enough for me," said the other, absently, as Big Ben overhead began to toll the hour of twelve.

By this time the Terrace was quite deserted; and after some little further chat (Mr. Winterbourne had lost much of his nervousness now, and of course all his talking was about Yolande, and her ways, and her liking for travel, and her anxiety to get rid of her half-French accent, and so forth), they turned into the House, where they separated, Winterbourne taking his seat below the gangway on the Government side, John Shortlands depositing his magnificent bulk on one of the Opposition benches.

There was a general hum of conversation. There was also, as presently appeared, some laborious discourse going forward on the part of a handsome-looking elderly gentleman—a gentleman who, down in the country, was known to be everything that an Englishman could wish to be: an efficient magistrate, a plucky rider to hounds, an admirable husband and father, and a firm believer in the Articles of the Church of England. Unhappily, alas, he had acquired some other beliefs. He had got it into his head that he was an orator; and as he honestly did believe that talking was of value to the State—that it was a builder up and maintainer of Empire—he was now most seriously engaged in clothing some rather

familiar ideas in long and Latinised phrases, the while the House murmured to itself about its own affairs, and the Speaker gazed blankly into space, and the reporters in the Gallery thought of their courting days, or of their wives and children, or of their supper, and wondered when they were to get home to bed. The speech had a half somnolent effect; and those who were so inclined had an excellent opportunity for the dreaming of dreams.

What dreams, then, were likely to visit the brain of the member for Slagpool, as he sat there with his eyes distraught? His getting up some fateful evening to move a vote of want of confidence in the government? His appearance on the platform of the Slagpool Mechanics' Institute, with the great mass of people rising and cheering and waving their handkerchiefs? Or perhaps some day—for who could tell what changes the years might bring?—his taking his place on the Treasury bench there?

He had got hold of a bluebook. It was the Report of a Royal Commission; but of course all the cover of the folio volume was not printed over—there were blank spaces. And so (while those laborious and ponderous sentences were being poured out to inattentive ears) the member for Slagpool began idly and yet thoughtfully to pencil certain letters up at one corner of the blue cover. He was a long time about it; perhaps he saw pictures as he slowly and contemplatively formed each letter; perhaps no one but himself could have made out what the uncertain pencilling meant. But it was not of politics he was thinking. The letters that he had faintly pencilled there—that he was still wistfully regarding as though they could show him things far away—formed the word *YOLANDE*. It was like a lover.

CHAPTER III.

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT.

NEXT morning his nervous anxiety to get Yolande away at once out of London was almost pitiable to witness, though he strove as well as he could to conceal it from her. He had a hundred excuses. Oatlands was becoming very pretty at that time of

the year. There was little of importance going on in the House. London was not good for the roses in her cheeks. He himself would be glad of a breather up St. George's Hill, or a quiet stroll along to Chertsey. And so forth ; and so forth.

Yolande was greatly disappointed. She had been secretly nursing the hope that at last she might be allowed to remain in London, in some capacity or another, as the constant companion of her father. She had enough sense to see that the time consumed in his continually coming to stay with her in the country must be a serious thing for a man in public life. She was in a dim sort of way afraid that these visits might become irksome to him, even although he himself should not be aware of it. Then she had her ambitions, too. She had a vague impression that the country at large did not quite understand and appreciate her father ; that the people did not know him as she knew him. How could they, if he were to be for ever forsaking his public duties in order to gad about with a girl just left school ? Never before (Yolande was convinced) had the nation such urgent need of his services. There were a great many things wrong which he could put right ; of that she had no manner of doubt. The Government were making a tyrannical use of a big majority to go their own way, not heeding the warnings and protests of independent members ; this amongst many other things ought to be attended to. And it was at such a time, and just when she had revealed to him her secret aspiration that she might perhaps become his private secretary, that he must needs tell her to pack up, and insist on quitting London with her. Yolande could not understand it ; but she was a biddable and obedient kind of creature ; and so she took her place in the four-wheeled cab without any word of complaint.

And yet, when once they were really on their way from London—when the railway-carriage was fairly out of the station—her father's manner seemed to gain so much in cheerfulness that she could hardly be sorry they had left. She had not noticed that he had been more anxious and nervous that morning than usual ; but she could not fail to remark how much brighter his look was now they were out in the clearer air. And when Yolande saw her father's eyes light up like this—as they did occasionally—she was apt to forget about the injury that was being done to the affairs of the Empire. They had been much

together, these two ; and anything appertaining to him was of keen interest to her ; whereas the country at large was something of an abstraction ; and the mechanical majority of the Government—for which she had a certain measure of contempt—little more than a name.

“Yolande,” said he (they had the compartment to themselves), “I had a talk with John Shortlands last night.”

“Yes, papa ?”

“And if England slept well from that time until this morning it was because she little knew the fate in store for her. Think of this, child ; I half threatened to throw up my place in Parliament altogether—letting the country go to the mischief if it liked ; and then the arrangement would be that you and I, Yolande—now just consider this—that you and I start away together, and roam all over the world, looking at everything, and amusing ourselves—going just where we liked—no one to interfere with us—you and I all by ourselves—now, Yolande !”

She had clasped her hands with a quick delight.

“Oh, papa, that would indeed——”

But she stopped ; and instantly her face grew grave again.

“Oh no,” she said, “no ; it would not do. Last night, papa, you were reproachful of me——”

“‘Reproachful of me !’” he repeated, mockingly.

“Reproachful to me ?” she said, with inquiring eyes. But he himself was not ready with the correct phrase ; and so she went on : “Last night you were reproachful that I had taken up so much of your time ; and though it was all in fun, still it was true ; and now I am no longer a schoolgirl ; and I wish to help you if I can, and not be merely tiresome and an encumbrance——”

“You are so much of an encumbrance, Yolande !” he said, with a laugh.

“Yes,” she said, gravely ; “you would tire of me if we went away like that. In time you would tire. One would tire of always being amused ; all the people that we see have work to do ; and some day—it might be a long time—but some day you would think of Parliament, and you would think you had given it up for me——”

“Don’t make such a mistake !” said he. “Do not consider yourself of such importance, Miss. If I threw over Slagpool,

and started as a Wandering Jew—I mean we should be two Wandering Jews, you know, Yolande—it would be quite as much on my own account as yours——”

“You would become tired of being amused. You could not always travel,” she said. She put her hand on his hand. “Ah, I see what it is,” she said, with a little laugh. You are concealing. That is your kindness, papa. You think I am too much alone; it is not enough that you sacrifice to-day, to-morrow, next day, to me; you wish to make a sacrifice altogether; and you pretend you are tired of politics. But you cannot make me blind to it. I see—oh, quite clearly I can see through your pretence!”

He was scarcely listening to her now.

“I suppose,” he said, absently, “it is one of those fine things that are too fine ever to become true. Fancy now—the two of us just wandering away wherever we pleased—resting a day, a week, a month, when we came to some beautiful place—all by ourselves in the wide world.”

“I have often noticed that, papa,” she said, “that you like to talk about being away—about being remote——”

“But we should not be like the Wandering Jew in one respect,” he said, almost to himself. “The years would tell. There would be a difference. Something might happen to one of us.”

And then, apparently a new suggestion entered his mind. He glanced at the girl opposite him—timidly and anxiously.

“Yolande,” said he, “I—I wonder now—I suppose at your age—well, have you ever thought of getting married?”

She looked up at him with her clear, frank eyes, and when she was startled like that her mouth had the slight pathetic droop, already noticed, that made her face so sensitive and charming.

“Why, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times!” she exclaimed, still with the soft clear eyes wondering.

His eyes were turned away. He appeared to attach no importance to this confession.

“Of course,” she said, “when I say I have thought hundreds of times of getting married, it is about not getting married that I mean. No. That is my resolution. Oh, many a time I have said that to myself. I shall not marry—never—no one.”

In spite of himself his face suddenly brightened up ; and it was quite cheerfully that he went on to say—

“ Oh, but, Yolande, that is absurd. Of course you will marry. Of course you must marry.”

“ When you put me away, papa.”

“ When I put you away ! ” he repeated, with a laugh.

“ Yes,” she continued, quite simply. “ That was what Madame used to say. She used to say ‘ If your papa marries again, that is what you must expect. It will be better for you to leave the house. But your papa is rich ; you will have a good portion ; then you will find some one to marry you, and give you also an establishment.’ ‘ Very well,’ I said, ‘ but that is going too far, Madame ; and till my papa tells me to go away from him I shall not go away, and there is not any necessity that I shall marry any one.’ ”

“ I wish Madame had minded her own affairs,” Mr. Winterbourne said, angrily. “ I am not likely to marry again. I shall not marry again. Put that out of your head, Yolande—at once, and for always. But as for you—well, don’t you see, child—I—I can’t live for ever ; and you have got no very near relatives ; and besides, living with relatives isn’t always the pleasantest of things ; and I should like to see your future quite settled. I should like to know that—that——”

“ My future ! ” Yolande said, with a light laugh. “ No, I will have nothing to do with a future ; is not the present very good ? Look—here I am ; I have you ; we are going out together, to have walks, rides, boating ; is it not enough ? Do I want any stranger to come in to interfere ? No ; some day you will say ‘ Yolande, you worry me. You stop my work. Now I am going to attend to Parliament ; and you have got to marry ; and go off ; and not worry me.’ Very well. It is enough. What I shall say is this : Papa, choose for me. What do I know ? I do not know, and I do not care. Only a few things are necessary—are quite entirely necessary. He must not talk all day long about horses. And he must be in Parliament. And he must be on your side in Parliament. How much is that—three ?—three qualifications. That is all.”

Indeed, he found it was no use trying to talk to her seriously about this matter. She laughed it aside. She did not believe there was any fear about her future. She was well content

with the world as it existed ; was not the day fine enough, and Weybridge, and Chertsey, and Esher, and Moulsey all awaiting them ? If her father would leave his Parliamentary duties to look after themselves, she was resolved to make the most of the holiday.

"Oh, but you don't know," said he, quite falling in with her mood, "you don't know Yolande, one fifteenth part of what is in store for you. I don't believe you have the faintest idea why I am going down to Oatlands at this minute."

"Well, I don't, papa," she said, "except through a madness of kindness."

"Would it surprise you if I asked Mrs. Graham to take you with them for that sail to Suez or Aden ?"

She threw up her hands in affright.

"Alone?" she exclaimed. "To go away alone with strangers?"

"Oh no ; I should be going also—of course."

"But the time——"

"I should be back for the Budget. Yolande," said he, gravely, "I am convinced—I am seriously convinced—that no one should be allowed to sit in Parliament who has not visited Gibraltar, and the island of Malta, and such places, and seen how the Empire is held together, and what our foreign possessions are——"

"It is only an excuse, papa—it is only an excuse to give me another holiday !——"

"Be quiet. I tell you the country ought to compel its legislators to go out in batches—paying the expenses of the poorer ones, of course—and see for themselves what our soldiers and sailors are doing for us. I am certain that I have no right to sit in Parliament until I have visited the fortifications of Malta and inspected the Suez Canal."

"Oh, if it is absolutely necessary," Yolande said with a similar gravity.

"It is absolutely necessary. I have long felt it to be so. I feel it is a duty to my country that we should personally examine Malta."

"Very well, papa," said Yolande, who was so pleased to find her father in such good humour that she forbore to protest, even though she was vaguely aware that the confidence

of the electorate of Slagpool was again being abused in order that she should enjoy another long and idling voyage, with the only companion whom she cared to have with her.

The Grahams were the very first people they saw when they reached Oatlands. Colonel Graham—a tall, stout, grizzled, good-natured-looking man—was lying back in a garden-seat, smoking a cigar and reading a newspaper; while his wife was standing close by, calling to her baby, which plump small person was vainly trying to walk to her, under the guidance of an ayah, whose dusky skin and silver ornaments and flowing garments of Indian red looked picturesque enough on an English lawn. Mrs. Graham was a pretty woman, of middle height, with a pale face, a square forehead, short hair inclined to curl, and dark gray eyes with black eyelashes, and black eyebrows. But along with her prettiness, which was only moderate, she had an exceedingly fascinating manner, and a style that was at least attractive to men. Women, especially when they found themselves deserted, did not like her style; they said there was rather too much of it; they said it savoured of the garrison-flirt, and was obviously an importation from India; and they thought she talked too much, and laughed too much, and altogether had too little of the dignity of a matron. No doubt they would have hinted something about the obscurity of her birth and parentage, had that been possible. But it was not possible; for everybody knew that when Colonel Graham married her, as his second wife, she was the only daughter of Lord Lynn, who was the thirteenth baron of that name in the peerage of Scotland.

Now this pretty, pale-faced, gray-eyed woman professed herself overjoyed when Mr. Winterbourne said there was a chance of his daughter and himself joining her and her husband on their suggested P. and O. trip; but the lazy, good-humoured-looking soldier glanced up from his paper and said—

“Look here, Polly, it’s too absurd. What would people say! It’s all very well for you and me; we are old Indians and don’t mind; but if Mr. Winterbourne is coming with us—and you, Miss Winterbourne—we must do something more reasonable and Christian-like than sail out to Suez or Aden and back, all for nothing.”

“But nothing could suit us better!” Yolande’s father said

—indeed, he did not mind where or why he went, so long as he got away from England, and Yolande with him.

“Oh, but we must do something,” Colonel Graham said. “Look here. When we were at Peshawur a young fellow came up there—you remember young Ismat, Polly?—well, I was of some little assistance to him; and he said any time we wanted to see something of the Nile I could have his father’s dahabeeyah—or rather one of them, for his father is Governor of Merhadj, and a bit of a swell, I fancy. There you are, now. That would be something to do. People wouldn’t think we were idiots. We could have our sail all the same to Suez, and see the old faces at Gib. and Malta; then we could have a skim up the Nile a bit—and by the way, we shall have it all to ourselves just now——”

“The very thing!” exclaimed Mr. Winterbourne, eagerly, for his imagination seemed easily captured by the suggestion of anything remote. “Nothing could be more admirable. Yolande, what do you say?”

Yolande’s face was sufficient answer.

“My dear child,” said Mrs. Graham, in an awful whisper, “have you got a Levinge?”

“A what?” said Yolande.

“You have not? And you might have gone to Egypt at this time of the year, without a Levinge!”

“What are you talking about the time of the year, Polly!” her husband cried peevishly. “It is the only time of the year that the Nile is tolerable. It is no longer a Cockney route. You have the whole place to yourself—at least, so Ismat Effendi assured me; and if he has given me a wrong tip, wait till I get hold of him by the nape of his Egyptian neck. And you needn’t frighten Miss Yolande about mosquitoes or any of the other creatures of darkness; for you’ve only to get her one of those shroud things——”

“Just what I was saying!” his wife protested.

Indeed, she seemed greatly pleased about this project; and when they went in to lunch, they had a table to themselves, so as to secure a full and free discussion of plans. Mrs. Graham talked in the most motherly way to Yolande; and petted her. She declared that those voyages to America, of which Yolande had told her, had nothing of the charm and

variety and picturesqueness of the sail along the African shores. Yolande would be delighted with it ; with the people on board ; with the ports they would call at ; with the blue of the Mediterranean Sea. It was all a wonder, as she described it.

But she was a shrewd-headed little woman. Very soon after lunch she found an opportunity of talking with her husband alone.

"I think Yolande Winterbourne prettier and prettier the longer I see her," she said, carelessly.

"She's a good-looking girl. You'll have to look out, Polly. You won't have the whole ship waiting on you this time."

"And very rich—quite an heiress, they say."

"I suppose Winterbourne is pretty well off."

"He himself has nothing to do with the firm now, I suppose."

"I think not."

"Besides, making engines is quite respectable. Nobody could complain of that."

"I shouldn't, if it brought me in £15,000 or £20,000 a year," her husband said, grimly. "I'd precious soon have Inverstronan added on to Inverstroy."

"Oh," she said, blithely, "talking about the north, I haven't heard from Archie for a long time. I wonder what he is about—watching the nesting of the grouse, I suppose. I say, Jim, I wish you'd let me ask him to go with us. It's rather dull for him up there ; my father isn't easy to live with. May I ask him ?"

She spoke very prettily and pleadingly.

"He'll have to pay his own fare to Suez and back, then," her husband answered, rather roughly.

"Oh yes ; why not ?" she said, with great innocence : "I am sure poor Archie is always willing to pay when he can ; and I do wish my father would be a little more liberal. I am sure he might. Every inch of shooting and fishing was let last year !—even the couple of hundred yards along the river that Archie always has had for himself. I don't believe he threw a fly last year——"

"He did on the Stroy," her husband said, gloomily.

"That was because you were so awfully good to him," said his wife, in her sweetest manner. "And you can be awfully

good to people, Jim, when you don't let the black bear ride on your shoulders."

Then Mrs. Graham, smoothing her pretty short curls, and with much pleasure visible in the pretty dark gray eyes, went to her own room and sat down, and wrote as follows :—

"DEAR ARCHIE,—Jim's good nature is beyond anything. We are going to have a look at Gib. again, and at Malta, just for auld lang syne ; and then Jim talks of taking us up the Nile a bit ; and he says you ought to go with us, and you will only have to pay your passage to Suez and back—which you could easily save out of your hats and boots if you would only be a little less extravagant, and get them in Inverness instead of in London. Mr. Winterbourne, the member for Slagpool, is going with us ; and he and Jim will halve the expenses of the Nile voyage. Mr. Winterbourne's daughter makes up the party. She is rather nice, I think ; but only a child. Let me know at once. There is a P. and O. on the 17th—I think we shall catch that ; Jim and the captain are old friends.—Your loving sister,
"POLLY."

She folded up the letter ; put it in an envelope ; and addressed it so—

The Hon. the Master of Lynn,
Lynn Towers,
by Inverness, N.B.

CHAPTER IV.

A FAREWELL TO ENGLAND.

A VOYAGE in a P. and O. steamer is so familiar a matter to thousands of English readers that very little need be said about it here in detail, except indeed, in so far as this particular voyage affected the fortunes of these one or two people. And Yolande's personal experiences began early. The usual small crowd of passengers was assembled in Liverpool Street Station—hurrying, talking, laughing, and scanning possible ship-companions with an eager curiosity ; and in the midst of them, Yolande, for a wonder—her father having gone to look after

some luggage—found herself for the moment alone. A woman came into this wide, hollow-resounding station, and timidly and yet anxiously scanned the faces of the various people who were on the platform adjoining the special train. She was a respectably dressed person, apparently a mechanic's wife; but her features bore the marks of recent crying—they were all “begrutten,” as the Scotch say. She carried a small basket. After an anxious scrutiny—but it was only the women she regarded—she went up to Yolande.

“I beg your pardon, Miss,” she said—but she could say no more, for her face was tremulous.

Yolande looked at her; thought she was drunk; and turned away rather frightened.

“I beg your pardon, Miss”——And with that her trembling hands opened the basket, which was filled with flowers.

“No, thank you; I don't want any,” said Yolande civilly. But there was something in the woman's imploring eyes that said something to her. She was startled; and stood still.

“Are—are you going farther than Gibraltar, Miss?”

“Yes. Yes, I think so,” said Yolande, wondering.

There were tears running down the woman's face. For a second or two she tried to speak, ineffectually; then she said—

“Two days out from—from Gibraltar—would you be so kind, Miss, as to put—these flowers—on the water?—My little girl was buried at sea—two days out——”

Oh, I understand you,” said Yolande, quickly—with a big lump in her throat. “Oh yes, I will! I am so sorry for you——”

She took the basket. The woman burst out crying; and hid her face in her hands; and then turned to go away. She was so distracted with her grief that she had forgotten even to say “Thank you.” At the same moment Mr. Winterbourne came up—hastily and angrily.

“What is this?”

“Hush, papa! The poor woman had a little girl buried at sea—these are some flowers——”

Yolande went quickly after her, and touched her on the shoulder.

“Tell me,” she said, “what was your daughter's name?”

The woman raised her tear-stained face.

"Jane. We called her Janie ; she was only three years old ; she would have been ten by now. You won't forget, Miss—it was—it was two days beyond Gibraltar that—that we buried her——"

"Oh no ; do you think I could forget ?" Yolande said ; and she offered her hand. The woman took her hand, and pressed it ; and said, "God bless you, Miss—I thought I could trust your face ;" then she hurried away.

Yolande went back to her father, who, though closely watching her, was standing with the Grahams ; and she told them (with her own eyes a little bit moist) of the mission with which she had been entrusted ; but neither she nor they thought of asking why, out of all the people about to go down by the steamer train, this poor woman should have picked out Yolande as the one by whom she would like to have those flowers strewn on her child's ocean grave. Perhaps there was something in the girl's face that assured the mother that she was not likely to forget.

And at last the crowd began to resolve itself into those who were going and those who were remaining behind ; the former establishing themselves in the compartments, the latter talking all the more eagerly as the time grew shorter. And Mrs. Graham was in despair because of the non-appearance of her brother.

"There," she said to her husband, as the door of the carriage was finally locked, and the train began to move out of the station, "I told you. I told you I should not be surprised. It is just like him—always wanting to be too clever. Well, his coolness has cost him something this time. I told you I should not at all be surprised if he missed the train altogether."

"I don't think the Master's finances are likely to run to a special," her husband said, good-humouredly.

"Oh, it is too provoking !" exclaimed the pretty young matron (but, with all her anger, she did not forget to smooth her tightly fitting costume as she settled into her seat). "It is too provoking ! I left Baby at home more on his account than on any one else's. If there was the slightest sound, I knew he would declare that Baby had been crying all the night through. There never was a better baby—never ! Now, was there ever, Jim ?"

"Well, I can't answer for all the babies that ever were in the world," her husband said, in his easy, good-natured way; "but it is a good enough baby, as babies go!"

"It is the very best-tempered baby I ever saw or heard of," she said, emphatically; and she turned to Yolande. "Just think, dear, of my leaving Baby in England for two whole months, and mostly because I knew my brother would complain. And now he goes and misses the train—through laziness, or indifference, or wanting to be too sharp——"

"I should think that Baby would be much better off on land than on board ship," said Yolande, with a smile.

"Of course, Miss Winterbourne," the Colonel said. "You're quite right. A baby on board a ship is a nuisance."

"Jim! You don't deserve——"

"And there's another thing," continued the stout and grizzled soldier, with the most stolid composure. "I've seen it often on board ship. I know what happens. If the mother of the baby is old or ugly, its all right; the baby is let alone. But if she's young and good-looking, it's wonderful how the young fellows begin and pet the baby, and feed it up on toffy and oranges. What do they know? Hang 'em, they'd fetch up pastry from the saloon and give it to a two-year-old. That aint good for a baby."

"Poor Archie!" said his wife, rather inconsequently "it will be such a disappointment for him."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Colonel Graham, "I believe he has never heard that the P. and O. ships don't stop at Southampton now. Never mind, Polly: he can go overland, if he wants to catch us up at Cairo."

"And miss the whole voyage! she exclaimed, aghast. "And forfeit his passage-money? Fancy the cost of the railway journey to Brinçisi!"

"Well, if people will miss trains, they must pay the penalty," her husband remarked, quietly; and there was an end of that.

At Tilbury there was the usual scramble of getting the luggage transferred to the noisy little tender; and the natural curiosity with which every one was eager to scan the great and stately vessel which was to be their floating home for many a day. And here there was a surprise for at least one of the party. When, after long delays, and after a hurried steaming

out into the river, the tender was drawing near the side of the huge steamer, of course all eyes were turned to the decks above, where the picturesque costumes of the Lascar crew were the most conspicuous points of colour. But there were obviously a number of other people on board, besides the dusky crew and their English officers.

"There he is, I can make him out," observed Colonel Graham.

"Who?" his wife asked.

"Why, the Master of Lynn," he answered, coolly.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, in either real or affected anger. "Shan't I give it him! To think of his causing us all this disquietude!"

"Speak for yourself, Polly," her husband said, as he regarded a group of young men who were up on the hurricane-deck, leaning over the rail, and watching the approach of the tender. "I wasn't much put out, was I? And apparently he hasn't been; for he is smoking a cigar, and chatting to—yes, by Jove! It's Jack Douglas—and young Mackenzie of Sleat—oh, there's Ogilvy's brother-in-law—what do you call him?—the long fellow who broke his leg at Bombay—there's young Fraser, too, eye-glass and all—a regular gathering of the clans—there'll be some Nap going among those boys!"

"I hope you won't let Archie play, then!" his wife said, sharply. But she turned with a charming little smile to Yolande. "You mustn't think my brother is a gambler, you know, dear; but really some of those young officers play far beyond their means, and Archie is very popular amongst them, I am told——"

But by this time everybody was scrambling on to the paddle-boxes of the tender, and from thence ascending to the deck of the steamer. The Master of Lynn was standing by the gangway, awaiting his sister. He was a young man of four or five and twenty, slim, well built, with a pale, olive complexion, and a perfectly clean-shaven face; and he had the square forehead, the well-marked eyebrows, and the pleasant gray eyes with dark eyelashes that his sister had. But he had not her half-curly hair; for his was shorn bare, in soldier fashion—though he was not a soldier.

"How are you, Graham? How are you, Polly?" said he.

"Well, I like your coolness!" his sister said, angrily "Why were you not at the station? Why did you not tell us? Of course we thought you had missed the train! I wish you would take the trouble to let people know what you are about. Let me introduce you to Miss Winterbourne. Yolande, dear, this is my brother Archie—Mr. Winterbourne, my brother, Mr. Leslie. Well, now, what have you to say for yourself?"

He had thrown away his cigar.

"Not much," said he, smiling good-naturedly, and taking some wraps and things from her which her husband had selfishly allowed her to carry. "I went down to see some fellows at Chatham last night; and of course I stayed there and came over in the morning. Sorry I vexed you. You see, Miss Winterbourne, my sister likes platform parade; she likes to have people round her for half-an-hour before the train starts; and she likes to walk up and down, for it shows off her figure and her dress; isn't that so, Polly? But you hadn't half your display this morning, apparently. Where's Baby? Where's Ayah?"

"You know very well. You would have been grumbling all the time if I had brought Baby——"

"Well," said he, looking rather aghast, "if you've left Baby behind on my account, I shall have a pleasant time of it. I don't believe you. But tell me the number of your cabin, and I'll take these things down for you. I'm on the spar-deck, thank goodness."

"Miss Winterbourne's cabin is next to mine; so you can take her things down too."

"No, thank you," said Yolande, who was looking out for her luggage (her maid being in a hopeless state of bewilderment), and who had nothing in her hand but the little basket. "I will take this down myself, by and by."

There was a great bustle and confusion on board; friends giving farewell messages; passengers seeking out their cabins; the bare-armed and bare-footed Lascars, with their blue blouses and red turbans, hoisting luggage on to their shoulders and carrying it along the passages. Mr. Winterbourne was impatient.

"I hate this—this confusion and noise," he said.

"But, papa," said Yolande, "I know your things as well as my own. Jane and I will see to them when they come on board. Please go away and get some lunch—please! Everything will be quiet in a little while."

"I wish we were off," he said, in the same impatient way. "This delay is quite unnecessary. It is always the same. We ought to have started before now. Why doesn't the captain order the ship to be cleared?"

"Papa, dear, do go and get places at the table. The Grahams have gone below. And have something very nice waiting for me. See, there comes your other portmanteau, now; and there is only the topee-box, and I know it because I put a bit of red silk on the handle. Papa, do go down and get us comfortable places—I will come as soon as I have sent your topee-box to your cabin. I suppose we shall be near the Grahams."

"Oh, I know where Mrs. Graham will be," her father said peevishly. "She will be next the captain. She is the sort of woman who always sits next the captain."

"Then the captain is very lucky, papa," said Yolande, mildly; "for she is exceedingly nice; and she has been exceedingly kind to me."

"I suppose the day will come when this captain, or any other captain, would be just as glad to have you sit next him," he said.

"Papa," she said, with a smile, "are you jealous of Mrs. Graham for my sake? I am sure I do not wish to sit next the captain; I have not even seen him yet that I know of."

But this delay, necessary or unnecessary, made him irritable and anxious. He would not go to the saloon until he had seen all the luggage—both his and Yolande's—despatched to their respective cabins. Then he began to inquire why the ship did not start? Why were the strangers not packed off on board the tender and sent ashore? Why did the chief officer allow these boats to be hanging about? The agent of the company had no right to be standing talking on deck two hours after the ship was timed to sail.

Meanwhile Yolande stole away to her own cabin, and carefully, and religiously—and, indeed, with a little choking in the throat—opened the little basket that held the flowers,

to see whether they might not be the better for a sprinkling of water. They were rather expensive flowers for a poor woman to have bought; and the damp moss in which they were embedded, and the basket itself also, were more suggestive of Covent Garden than of Whitechapel. Yolande poured some water into the wash-hand basin, and dipped her fingers into it, and very carefully and tenderly sprinkled the flowers over. And then she considered what was likely to be the coolest and safest place in the cabin for them, and hung the basket there, and came out again, shutting the door, involuntarily, with quietness.

She passed through the saloon, and went up on deck. Her father was still there.

"Papa," said she, "you are a very unnatural person. You are starving me——"

"Haven't you had lunch, Yolande?" said he, with a sudden compunction.

"No, I have not. Do I ever have lunch without you? I am waiting for you."

"Really this delay is most atrocious!" he said. "What is the use of advertising one hour and sailing at another? There can be no excuse. The tender has gone ashore——"

"Oh, but, papa, they say there is a lady who missed the train, and is coming down by a special——"

"I don't believe a word of it! Why, that is worse. The absurdity of keeping a ship like this waiting for an idiot of a woman!"

"I am so hungry, papa!"

"Well, go down below and get something—if you can. No doubt the gross mismanagement reaches to the saloon tables as well."

She put her hand within his arm, and half drew him along to the companion-way.

"What is the difference of an hour or two," said she, "if we are to be at sea for a fortnight? Perhaps the poor lady who is coming down by the special train has some one ill abroad. And—and besides, papa, I am so very, very, very hungry."

He went down with her to the saloon, and took his place in silence. Yolande sat next to Mrs. Graham, who was very

talkative and merry, even though there was no captain in his place to do her honour. Young Archie Leslie was opposite, so was Colonel Graham. They were mostly idling; but Yolande was hungry, and they were all anxious to help her at once, though the silent dusky stewards knew their duties well enough.

By and by, when they were talking about anything or nothing, it occurred to the young Master of Lynn to say—

“I suppose you don’t know that we are off?”

“No! impossible!” was the general cry.

“Oh, but we are, though. Look!”

Mr. Winterbourne quickly got up and went to one of the ports; there, undoubtedly, were the river banks slowly, slowly going astern.

He went back to his seat, putting his hands on Yolande’s shoulder as he sat down.

“Yolande,” said he, “do you know that we are off—really and truly going away from England—altogether quit from its shores?”

His manner had almost instantly changed. His spirits quickly brightened up. He made himself most agreeable to Mrs. Graham; and was humorous in his quiet, half-sardonic way; and was altogether pleased with the appearance and the appointments of the ship. To fancy this great mass of metal moving away like that and the throbbing of the screw scarcely to be detected!

“You know, my dear Mrs. Graham,” he said, presently, “this child of mine is a most economical—even a penurious—creature, and I must depend on you to force her to make proper purchases at the different places—all the kinds of things that women-folk prize, don’t you know. Lace, now; what is the use of being at Malta if you don’t buy lace? And embroideries and things of that kind; she ought to bring back enough of eastern silks and stuffs to last her a lifetime. And jewellery, too—silver suits her very well;—she must get plenty of that at Cairo——”

“Oh, you can leave that to my wife,” Colonel Graham said, confidently. “She’d buy up the Pyramids if she could take them home. I’m glad it won’t be my money.”

And this was but one small item of expectation. The

voyage before them furnished forth endless hopes and schemes. They all adjourned to the hurricane-deck, and here his mood of contented cheerfulness was still more obvious. He was quite delighted with the cleanness and order of the ship, and with the courtesy of the captain, and with the smart look of the officers; and he even expressed approval of the pretty, quiet, not romantic scenery of the estuary of the Thames. Yolande was with him. When they walked they walked arm-in-arm. He said he thought the Grahams were likely to be excellent companions; Mrs. Graham was a charming woman; there was a good deal of quiet humour about her husband; the Master of Lynn was a frank-mannered young fellow, with honest eyes. His step grew jaunty. He told Yolande she must, when in Egypt, buy at least half-a-dozen eastern costumes, the more gorgeous the better, so that she should never be at a loss when asked to go to a fancy-dress ball.

And at dinner, too, in the evening it was a delight to Yolande to sit next him and listen to his chuckles and his little jokes. Care seemed to have left him altogether. The night, when they went on deck again, was dark; but a dark night pleased him as much as anything. Yolande was walking with him.

And then they sat down with their friends; and Mrs. Graham had much to talk about. Yolande sat silent. Far away in the darkness a long, thin, dull line of gold was visible; she had been told that these were the lights of Hastings. It is a strange thing to sail past a country in the night-time, and to think of all the beating human hearts it contains—of the griefs, and despairs, and hushed joys, all hidden away there in the silence. And perhaps Yolande was thinking most of all of the poor mother, whose name she did not know, whom she should never see again, but whose heart she knew right well was heavy that night with its aching sorrow. It was her first actual contact with human misery; and she could not help thinking of the woman's face. That was terrible, and sad beyond anything that she could have imagined. For indeed her own life so far had been among the roses. As Mrs. Graham had said, she was but a child.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BELL.

"It is really quite wonderful how intimate you become with people on board ship, and how well you get to know them."

This not entirely novel observation was addressed to Yolande by the Master of Lynn ; while these two, with some half-dozen others, were grouped together in the companion-way, where they had taken shelter from the flying seas. The remark was not new ; but he appeared to think it important. He seemed anxious to convince her of its truth.

"It is really quite wonderful," he repeated ; and he regarded the pretty face as if eager to meet with acquiescence there. "On board ship you get to know the characters of people so thoroughly ; you can tell whether the friendship is likely to last after the voyage is over. Balls and dinner parties are of no use ; that is only acquaintanceship ; at sea you are thrown so much together—you are cut off from the world, you know—there is a kind of fellow-feeling and companionship—that—that is quite different. Why," said he, with his eyes brightening, "it seems absurd to think that the day before yesterday you and I were absolute strangers ; and yet here you have been letting me bore you for hours by talking of Lynn and the people there——"

"Oh, I assure you I am very grateful," said Yolande, with much sincerity. "But for you I should have been quite alone."

The fact is, they had encountered a heavy two-days' gale outside the Bay of Biscay and south of that ; and as the ship was a pretty bad roller, sad havoc was wrought among the passengers. Mrs. Graham had disappeared from the outset. Her husband was occasionally visible ; but he was a heavy man, and did not like being knocked about, so he remained mostly in the saloon. Mr. Winterbourne was a good enough sailor, but the noises at night—he had a spar-deck cabin—kept him awake, and he spent the best part of the daytime in his berth, trying to get fitful snatches of sleep. Accordingly, Yolande, who wanted to see the sights of the storm, betook herself to the companion-way, where she would have been

entirely among strangers (being somewhat reserved in her walk and conversation) had it not been for Mr. Leslie. He, indeed, proved himself to be a most agreeable companion—modest, assiduously attentive, good-natured and talkative, and very respectful. He was entirely governed by her wishes. He brought her the news of the ship when it was not every one who would venture along the deck, dodging the heavy seas. He got her the best corner in this companion-way and the most comfortable of the chairs ; and he had rugs for her, and a book, only that she was far too much interested in what was going on around her to read. Once or twice, when she would stand by the door, he even ventured to put his hand on her arm—afraid lest she should be overbalanced and thrown out on the swimming decks. For there was a kind of excitement amid this roar and crash of wind and water. Who could decide which was the grander spectacle—that great mass of driven and tossing and seething silver that went out and out until it met a wall of black cloud at the horizon, or the view from the other side of the vessel (with one's back to the sunlight)—the mountains of blue rolling by, and their crests so torn by the gale that the foam ended in a rainbow flourish of orange and red ?

“ They say she is rolling 84 degrees ‘out and out,’ ” said Archie Leslie.

“ Oh, indeed, ” said Yolande, looking grave. “ But I don't quite know what that means. ”

“ Neither do I, ” said he ; “ but it sounds well. What I do know is that you won't see my sister until we get to Gib. You seem to be a capital sailor, Miss Winterbourne. ”

“ I have often had to be ashamed of it, ” said Yolande. “ To-day, also—there was no other lady at the table—oh, I cannot sit alone like that any more—no, I will rather have no dinner than go and sit alone—it is terrible—and the Captain laughing—— ”

“ Poor fellow, he is not in a laughing mood just now—— ”

“ Why, then ? There is no danger ? ”

“ Oh no. But I hear he has had his head cut open, a chronometer falling on him in his cabin. However, I think he'll show up at dinner ; it is only a flesh wound. They've had one of the boats stove in, they say, and some casks carried

away, and a good deal of smashing forward. I wonder if your father has got any sleep—I should think not. I'll go and see how he is getting on if you like——”

“Oh no ; if he is asleep that is very well. No,” said Yolande ; “I wish you to tell me more about your friend—the gentleman who was your tutor ; that is a very strange life for any one to live.”

What she wished was enough for him.

“I have not told you the strangest part of the story,” said he, “for you would not believe it.”

“Am I so unbelieving?” said she, looking up.

His eyes met hers, but only for an instant. Yolande's eyes were calm, smiling, unconcerned ; it was not in them, at all events, that any confusion lay.

“Of course I did not mean that,” said he ; “but—but one has one's character for veracity, don't you know—and if I were to tell you about Mrs. Bell—the story is too improbable——”

“Then it is about Mrs. Bell that I wish to hear,” said Yolande, in her gentle imperious way.

“Besides, I've bored you all day long about those people in Inverness-shire. You will think I have never seen any one else, and never been anywhere else. Now I would much rather hear about the Château and the people there. I want you to tell me what you thought of America—after living in that quiet place——”

“What I thought of America !” said Yolande, with a laugh. “That is a question indeed !”

Isn't it the question that all Americans ask of you? You have heard enough about the Inverness-shire people. Tell me about Rennes. Have you seen much of Paris? Did you like the Parisians?”

“Ah,” said she, “you are not so obedient to me as my papa is.”

“Fathers in Scotland are made of sterner stuff,” he answered. “We don't talk that way——”

“Now, listen,” she said. “I have the picture before me—everything complete—the lake, and Lynn Towers—the mountains and moorland, also the ravines where the deer take shelter—oh yes, I can see all that quite clear—but the central figure, that is absent.”

"The central figure?"

"Mrs. Bell."

He had quite forgotten about that lady; now he laughed.

"Oh no," he said; "Mrs. Bell is not so important as that. She has nothing to do with Lynn. She lives at Gress."

"Well, that is a beginning, at all events," she remarked.

"Oh, but must I really tell you the story? You will try hard to believe?"

"I am not unbelieving."

"Very well, then. I will tell you about Mrs. Bell, for I hope some day you will see her——"

She looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, I am going to ask your father to take a moor up there that I know of; and, of course, you would come to the lodge. If he cares about grouse-shooting, and isn't afraid of hard work, it is the very place for him. Then you would see my friend Melville—who ought to be Melville of Monaglen by rights—and maybe he will be before Mrs. Bell has done with him."

"Mrs. Bell again? Then I am to hear about her after all?——"

"Very well, then. Mrs. Bell is not Mrs. Bell; but Miss Bell; only they call her 'Mrs.' because she is an elderly lady, and is rich, and is a substantial and matronly-looking kind of person. Mrs. Bell was cook to the Melvilles—that was years and years ago, before old Mr. Melville died. But she was an ambitious party; and Gress wasn't enough for her. She could read, and it isn't every Highland servant lass who can do that. She read cookery books and made experiments. Now you see the adventures of Mrs. Bell don't make a heroic story——"

"But I am listening," said Yolande, with a calm air.

"She got to be rather clever, though there was not much chance for her in the Melvilles' house. Then she went to Edinburgh. All this is plain sailing. She got a situation in a hotel there; then she was allowed to try what she could do in the cooking line; then she was made head cook. That is the end of chapter one; and I suppose you believe me so far. Years went on and Kirsty was earning a good wage; and all that we knew of her was that she used to send small sums of money occasionally to help one or two of the poor people in Gress who

had been her neighbours ; for she had neither kith nor kin of her own. Then there happened to come to the hotel in Edinburgh an elderly English gentleman who was travelling about for his health ; and he was frightfully anxious about his food ; and he very much appreciated the cooking at the hotel. He made inquiries. He saw Kirsty, who was by this time a respectable middle-aged woman, getting rather gray. What does the old maniac do but tell her that he has only a few years to live ; that the cooking of his food is about the most important thing to him in the world ; that he has no near relatives to inherit his property ; and that if she will go to Leicestershire and bind herself to remain cook in his house as long as he lived, he would undertake to leave her every penny he possessed when he died. 'I will,' says Kirsty ; but she was a wise woman, and she went to the lawyers, and had everything properly settled. Shall I go on, Miss Winterbourne ? I don't think my heroine interests you. I wish you could see old Mrs. Bell——"

"Oh yes, go on. That is not so unbelievable. Of course I believe you, is it necessary to say that ?"

Yolande's calm demeanour was a little bit disturbed at this moment by a scattering of spray around her ; but she quickly dried her red-gold hair and the smooth oval of her cheeks.

"What comes after is a good bit stranger," he continued. "The old gentleman died ; only he lived much longer than anybody expected ; and Kirsty, at the age of fifty-eight or so, found herself in possession of an income of very near £4000 a year—well, I believe it is more than that now, for the property has increased in value. And now begins what I can't tell you half well enough—I wish you could hear Mrs. Bell's own account—I mean of the schemes that people laid to inveigle her into a marriage. You know she is rather a simple and kindly-hearted woman ; but she believes herself to be the very incarnation of shrewdness ; and certainly on that one point she showed herself shrewd enough. When my sister re-appears on deck again, you say to her 'Kirsty kenned better ;' and see if she does not recognise the phrase. Mrs. Bell's description of the various offers of marriage she has had beats anything ; but it was always 'Kirsty kenned better.' Yes ; and among these was a formal proposal from Lord——,—I mean the father of the

present Lord——; and that proposal was twice repeated; you know the ——s are awfully poor; and that one was at his wit's end for money. But Kirsty was not to be caught. Among other things, he stipulated that he was to be allowed to spend eight months of the year in London, she remaining either in Leicestershire or in the Highlands, as she pleased. More than that, he even got the Duke of —— to write to Miss Bell, and back up the suit, and promise that, if she would consent, he would himself go down and give her away——”

“The great Duke of ——?” said Yolande, with her eyes a little bit wider.

“Yes; the late Duke. I thought I should astonish you. But I have seen the Duke's letter—it is one of Mrs. Bell's proudest possessions—I have no doubt you will see it for yourself some day. But Kirsty kenned better——”

“What did she do, then?”

“What did she do? She went back to Gress, like a sensible woman. And she is more than sensible; she is remarkably good-natured; and she sought out the son of the old master—that's my friend Melville, you know—and then she tried all her flattery and shrewdness on him, until she got him persuaded that he should live in Gress—he was cadging about for another tutorship at the time—and make a sort of model village of it, and have old Kirsty for his housekeeper. Oh, she's clever enough in her way. She has picked up very good manners; she can hold her own with anybody. Moreover, she manages Melville most beautifully; and he isn't easy to manage. She is always very respectful; and makes him believe he is doing her a great kindness in spending her money in improving the village, and all that; but what she really means, of course, is that he should be a kind of small laird in the place that used to belong to his people. And that is what that woman means to do—I know it—I am certain of it. If ever Monaglen comes into the market she'll snap it up; she must have a heap saved, besides the original bulk of her property. Sooner or later she'll make Jack Melville ‘Melville of Monaglen,’ as sure as he's alive.”

“You and he are great friends, then?”

“Oh, he rather sits upon me,” the Master of Lynn said, modestly; “But we are pretty good friends, as things go.”

The gale did not abate much that afternoon ; on the contrary, the great ship seemed to be rolling more heavily than ever ; and at one minute a little accident occurred that might have been attended with more serious consequences. Mr. Winterbourne and young Leslie, not being able to reach the smoking-room on account of the seas coming over the bows, had sought shelter on a bench immediately aft of the hurricane-deck ; and there, enveloped in waterproofs, they were trying to keep their cigars alight. Unfortunately, the lashings securing this bench had not been very strong ; and at one bad lurch of the vessel—indeed the deck seemed to be at right angles with the water below them—away the whole thing went, spinning down to leeward. Leslie was a smart young fellow ; saw what was coming ; and before the bench had reached the gunwale, he had with one hand swung himself on to the ladder ascending to the hurricane-deck, while with the other he had seized hold of his companion's coat. Probably, had he not been so quick, the worst that could have happened was that the two of them might have had a thorough sousing in the water surging along the scuppers ; but when Yolande heard of the accident, and when Mr. Winterbourne, rather sadly, showed her his waterproof, which had been half torn from his back, she was instantly convinced that young Leslie had saved her father's life.

In consequence she was much less imperious and wilful in her manner all that afternoon ; and was even timidly polite to him. She consented, without a word, to go down to dinner—although, again, she was the only lady at table. And, indeed, dinner that evening was entirely a ludicrous performance. When Mr. Winterbourne and Yolande and young Leslie got to the foot of the companion-stairs, and, with much clinging, prepared to enter the saloon, the first thing they saw before them was a sudden wave of white that left the table and crashed against the walls. The stewards regarded the broken crockery with a ghastly smile, but made no immediate effort to pick up the fragments. The “fiddles” on the table were found to be of no use whatever. When these three sat down they could only make sure of such things as they could keep their fingers upon. Buttressing was of no avail. Plates, tumblers, knives, and forks, broke away, and steeple-chased over the fiddles, until

the final smash on the walls brought their career to a close. The din was awful; and Mr. Winterbourne was much too anxious about the objects around him to be able to make his customary little jokes. But they got through it somehow; and the only result of these wild adventures with rocketing loaves and plates and bottles was that Yolande and the young Master of Lynn seemed to be on more and more friendly and familiar terms. Yolande talked to him as frankly as if he had been her brother.

Next day matters mended considerably; and the next again broke blue and fair and shining, with an immense number of Mother Cary's chickens skimming along the sunlit waters. Far away in the south the pale line of the African coast was visible. People began to appear on deck who had been hidden for the last couple of days; Mrs. Graham was up and smiling, in an exceedingly pretty costume. When should they reach Gibraltar? Who was going ashore? Were there many "Scorpions" on board?

Yolande was not much of a politician; but her father being something of a "Jingo," of course she was a "Jingo" too; and she was very proud when, towards the afternoon, they drew nearer and nearer to the great gray scarred rock that commands the Mediterranean; and her heart warmed at the sight of a little red speck on one of the ramparts—an English sentry keeping guard there. And when they went ashore, and wandered through the streets, she had as much interest in plain Tommy Atkins in his red coat as in any of the more picturesquely clad Spaniards or Arabs she saw there; and when they went into the Alameda to hear the military band play, she knew by a sort of instinct that among the ladies sitting in their cool costumes under the maples and acacias such and such groups were Englishwomen—the wives of the officers, no doubt—and she would have liked to have gone and spoken to them. "Gib." seemed to her to be a bit of England, and therefore friendly and familiar; she thought the place looked tremendously strong; and she was glad to see such piles of shot and ranged rows of cannon; and she had a sort of gratitude in her heart towards the officers, and the garrison, and even the Englishwomen sitting there, with a tint of sunbrown on their cheeks, but an English look in their

eyes. And all this was absurd enough in a young minx who made a fool of English idioms nearly every time she opened her mouth!

What a beautiful night that was as they sailed away from the vast gray Rock. The moon was growing in strength now; and the heavens were clear. The passengers had begun to form their own little groups; acquaintanceships had been made; chairs drawn close together on the deck, in the silence, under the stars. And along there the skylight of the saloon was open; and there was a yellow glare coming up from below; also the sound of singing. They were at duets below—two or three young people; and whether they sung well or ill, the effect was pleasant enough, with the soft murmur of the Mediterranean all around. “O, who will o’er the downs so free”—of course they sang that; people always do sing that on board ship. Then they sang, “I would that my love could silently,” and many another old familiar air, the while the vessel churned on its way through the unseen waters, and the pale shadows thrown by the moon on the white decks slowly moved with the motion of the vessel. It was a beautiful night.

The Master of Lynn came aft from the smoking-room, and met his brother-in-law on the way.

“This is better, isn’t it?” said Colonel Graham. “This is more like what I shipped for.”

“Yes, this is better. Do you know where the Winterbournes are?”

“In the saloon. I have just left them there.”

Young Leslie was passing on; but he stopped.

“I say Graham, I’ve noticed one thing on board this ship already.”

“What?”

“You watch to-morrow, if they’re both on deck at the same time. You’ll find that Polly has got all the men about her; and Miss Winterbourne all the children. Odd, isn’t it?”

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE MEDITERRANEAN.

THEY were indeed cut off from the rest of the world, as they went ploughing their way through these blue Mediterranean seas. Day after day brought its round of amusements; and always the sun shining on the white decks; and the soft winds blowing; and now and again a swallow, or dove, or quail, or some such herald from unknown coasts, taking refuge for a while in the rigging or fluttering along by the vessel's side. There was an amateur photographer on board, moreover; and many were the groups that were formed and taken; only it was observed that when the officers were included the captain generally managed to have Yolande standing on the bridge beside him—a piece of favouritism that broke through all rules and regulations. There was a good deal of “Bull” played; and it was wonderful how, when Mrs. Graham was playing, there always happened to be a number of those young Highland officers about, ready to pick up her quoits for her. And always, but especially on the bright and breezy forenoons, there was a constitutional tramp up and down the long hurricane-deck—an occupation of which Yolande was particularly fond, and in which she found no one could keep up with her so untiringly as the Master of Lynn. She was just as well pleased, however, when she was alone; for then she sang to herself, and had greater freedom in flinging her arms about.

“Look at her,” her father said, one morning, to Mrs. Graham—concealing his admiration under an air of chagrin. “Wouldn't you think she was an octopus, or a windmill, or something like that?”

“I call it a rattling good style of walking,” said Colonel Graham, interposing. “Elbows in, palms out. She is a remarkably well-made young woman—that's my opinion——”

“But she isn't an octopus,” her father said, peevishly.

“Oh, that is merely an excess of vitality,” her champion said. “Look how springy her walk is! I don't believe her heel ever touches the deck—all her walking is done with the front part of her foot. Gad! it's infectious,” continued the

Colonel, with a grim laugh. "I caught myself trying it when I was walking with her yesterday. But it ain't easy at fifteen stone."

"She need not make herself ridiculous," her father said.

"Ridiculous? I think it's jolly to look at her. Makes one feel young again. She don't know that a lot of old foggies are watching her. Bet a sovereign she's talking about dancing. Archie's devilish fond of dancing—so he ought to be at his time of life. They say they're going to give us a ball to-night—on deck."

Pretty Mrs. Graham was a trifle impatient. There was none of the young officers about, for a wonder; they had gone to have their after-breakfast cigar in the smoking-room—and perhaps a little game of Nap, therewithal. This study of Yolande's appearance had lasted long enough in her opinion.

"It is clever of her to wear nothing on her head," she said, as she took up a book, and arranged herself in her chair. "Her hair is her best feature."

But what Yolande and her companion, young Leslie, were talking about, as they marched up and down the long white decks—occasionally stopping to listen to a small group of Lascars, who were chanting a monotonous sing-song refrain—had nothing in the world to do with dancing.

"You think, then, I ought to speak to your father about the moor? Would you like it?" said he.

"I?" she said. "That is nothing. If my papa and I are together, it is not any difference to me where we are. But if it is so wild and remote, that is what my papa will like."

"Remote!" said he, with a laugh. "It is fourteen miles away from anywhere. I like to hear those idiots talking who say the Highlands are overrun with tourists. Much they know about the Highlands. Well, now they've got the railway to Oban, I suppose Oban is pretty bad. But this place that I am telling you of—why you would not see a strange face from one year's end to the other!"

"Oh, that will exactly suit my papa—exactly," she said with a smile. "Is it very, *very* far away from everything and every one?"

"Isn't it!" he said, grimly. "Why, it's up near the sky, to begin with. I should say the average would be near three

thousand feet above the level of the sea. And as for remoteness—well, perhaps Kingussie is not more than fourteen miles off as the crow flies ; but then you've got the Monalea mountains between it and you ; and the Monalea mountains are not exactly the sort of place that a couple of old ladies would like to climb in search of wild flowers. You see, that is the serious part of it for you, Miss Winterbourne. Fancy the change between the temperature of the Nile and that high moorland——”

“Oh, that is nothing,” she said. “So long as I am out of doors, the heat or the cold is to me nothing—nothing at all.”

“The other change,” he continued, “I have no doubt would be striking enough—from the busy population of Egypt to the solitude of Allt-nam-ba——”

“What is it ? Allt——”

“Allt-nam-ba. It means the Stream of the Cows, though there are no cows there now. They have some strange names there—left by the people who have gone away. I suppose people did live there once ; though what they lived on I can't imagine. They have left names, anyway ; some of them simple enough—the Fair Winding Water, the Dun Water, the Glen of the Horses, the Glen of the Gray Loch, and so forth—but some of them I can't make out at all. One is the Glen of the Tombstone ; and I have searched it, and never could find any trace of a Tombstone. One is the Cairn of the Wanderers ; and they must have wandered a good bit before they got up there. Then there is a burn that is called the Stream of the Fairies—*Uisge nan Sithean*—that is simple enough ; but there is another place that is called Black Fairies. Now who on earth ever heard of black fairies?——”

“But it is not a frightful place?” she said. “It is not terrible—gloomy?”

“Not a bit !” said he. “These are only names. No one knows how they came there—that is all. Gloomy ? I think the strath from the foot of the moor down to our place is one of the prettiest straths in Scotland.”

“Then I should see Lynn Towers?” she said.

“Oh yes—it isn't much of a building, you know——”

“And Mr. Melville of Monaglen—that would be interesting to me——”

"Oh yes," said he; "but—but I wouldn't call him Monaglen—do you see—he hasn't got Monaglen—perhaps he may have it back some day."

"And you," she said, turning her clear eyes towards him,—"sometimes they call you Master—is it right?"

He smiled.

"Oh, that is a formal title—in Scotland. Colonel Graham makes a little joke of it—I suppose that is what you have heard——"

"I must not call you so?"

"Oh no,"—and then he said, with a laugh: "You may call me anything you like—what's the odds? If you want to please my brother-in-law you should call him Inverstroy."

"But how can I remember?" she said, holding up her fingers and counting. "Not Monaglen. Not Master. But yes, Inverstroy. And Mrs. Bell—shall I see her?"

"Certainly, if you go there."

"And the mill-wheels, and the electric lamps, and all the strange things?"

"Oh yes, if Jack Melville takes a fancy to you. He doesn't to everybody."

"Oh, I am not anxious," she said, with a little dignity. "I do not care much about such things. It is no matter to me."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times!" he said, with much earnestness. "Really, I was not thinking of what I was saying. I was thinking of Jack Melville's ways. Of course he'll be delighted to show you everything—he will be perfectly delighted. He is awfully courteous to strangers. He will be quite delighted to show you the whole of his instruments and apparatus."

"It is very obliging," she said, with something of coldness, "but there is no need that I shall be indebted to Mr. Melville——"

"Not of Monaglen—" he said, demurely.

"Of Monaglen, or not of Monaglen," she said, with high indifference. "Come, shall we go and find my papa, and tell him about the wild, far place, and the Stream of the Fairies?"

"No, wait a moment, Miss Winterbourne," said he, with a touch of embarrassment. "You see, that shooting belongs to my father. And I look after the letting of our shootings and fishings when I am at home; though of course we have an

agent. Now—now—I don't quite like taking advantage of a new friendship to—to—make such a suggestion—I mean I would rather sink the shop. Perhaps your father might get some other shooting up there——”

“But not with the Glen of the Black Fairies, and the strath, and Lynn Towers near the loch where the char are, and all that you have told me. No; if I am not to see Mrs. Bell—if I am not to see”——She was going to say Mr. Melville of Monaglen, but she waved that aside with a gesture of petulance——“No, I wish to see all that you have told me about; and I think it would be pleasant if we were neighbours.”

“You really must have neighbours,” said he, eagerly, “in a place like that! That is one thing certain. I am sure we should try to make it as pleasant for you as possible. I am sure my father would. And Polly would be up sometimes—I mean Mrs. Graham. Oh, I assure you, if it was any other shooting than Allt-nam-ba I should be very anxious that you and your father should come and take it. Of course, the lodge is not a grand place——”

“We will go and talk about it now,” she said, “to my papa; and you can explain.”

Now, as it turned out, although Mr. Winterbourne was rather staggered at first by Yolande's wild project of suddenly changing the idle luxuries of a Nile voyage for the severities of a moorland home in the north, there was something in the notion that attracted him. He began to make inquiries. The solitariness, the remoteness of the place seemed to strike him. Then 1050 brace of grouse, a few black game, a large number of mountain hares, and six stags, was a good return for nine weeks' shooting; and the last tenant had not had experts with him. Could Yolande have a piano or a harmonium sent to her away in that wilderness?—anything to break the silence of the hills. And Mr. Winterbourne was unlike most people who are contemplating the renting of a moor; the cost of it was the point about which he thought least. But to be away up there—with Yolande——

“Of course it is just possible that the place may have been let since I left,” the Master of Lynn said. “We have not had it vacant for many years back. But that could easily be ascertained at Malta by telegram.”

"You think you would like the place, Yolande?" her father said.

"I think so; yes."

"You would not die of cold?"

"Not willingly, papa—I mean I would try not—I am not afraid. You must go somewhere, papa; there is no Parliament then; you are fond of shooting; and there will be many days, not with shooting, for you and me to wander in the mountains. I think that will be nice."

"Very well. I will take the place, Mr. Leslie, if it is still vacant; and I hope we shall be good neighbours; and if you can send us a deer or two occasionally into the ravines you speak of, we shall be much obliged to you. And now about dogs—and gillies—and ponies——"

But this proved to be an endless subject of talk between these two, both then and thereafter; and so Yolande stole away to look after her own affairs. Amongst other things she got hold of the purser, and talked so coaxingly to him that he went and ordered the cook to make two sheets of toffee instead of one—and all of white sugar; so that when Yolande subsequently held her afternoon levée among the children of the steerage passengers she was provided with sweetstuff enough to make the hearts of the mothers quake with fear.

It was that evening that she had to put the flowers overboard—on the wide and sad and uncertain grave. She did not wish any one to see her, somehow; she could not make it a public ceremony—this compliance with the pathetic, futile wishes of the poor mother. She had most carefully kept the flowers sprinkled with water, and, despite of that, they had got sadly faded and shrivelled; but she had purchased another basketful at Gibraltar, and these were fresh enough. What mattered? The time was too vague; the vessel's course too uncertain; the trifles of flowers would soon be swallowed up in the solitary sea. But it was the remembrance of the mother she was thinking of.

She chose a moment when every one was down below at dinner, and the deck was quite deserted. She took the two little baskets to the rail; and there, very slowly and reverently, she took out handful after handful of the flowers and dropped them down on the waves, and watched them go floating and

floating out and out on the swaying waters. The tears were running down her face ; and she had forgotten whether there was anybody by or not. She was thinking of the poor woman in England. Would she know? Could she see? Was she sure that her request would not be forgotten? And indeed she had not gone so far wrong when she had trusted to the look of Yolande's face.

Then, fearing her absence might be noticed, she went quickly to her cabin, bathed her eyes in cold water, and then went below—where she found the little coterie at their end of the table all much exercised about Mr. Winterbourne's proposal to spend the autumn among the wild solitudes of Allt-nam-ba. He, indeed, declared he had nothing to do with it. It was Yolande's doing. He had never heard of Allt-nam-ba.

"It is one of the best grouse moors in Scotland, I admit that," Colonel Graham said, with an ominous smile ; "but it is a pretty stiffish place to work over."

"You talk like that, Jim," said his wife (who seemed anxious that the Winterbournes should preserve their fancy for the place), "because you are getting too stout for hill work. We shall find you on a pony soon. I should like to see you shooting from the back of a pony."

"Better men than me have done that," said Inverstry, good-humouredly.

They had a concert that night—not a ball, as was at first intended ; and there was a large assemblage, even the young gentlemen of the smoking-room having forsaken their Nap when they heard that Mrs. Graham was going to sing. And very well she sang, too, with a thoroughly trained voice of very considerable compass. She sang all the new society songs, about wild melancholies and regrets and things of that kind ; but her voice was really fine in quality ; and one almost believed for the moment that the pathos of these spasmodic things was true. And then her dress—how beautifully it fitted her neat little shoulders and waist ! Her curly short hair was surmounted by a coquettish cap ; she had a circle of diamonds set in silver round her neck ; but there were no rings to mar the symmetry of her plump and pretty white hands. And how assiduous those boy-officers were, although deprived of their cigars ! They hung round the piano ; they turned

over the music for her—as well as an eyeglass permitted them to see ; nay, when she asked, one of them sent for a banjo, and performed a solo on that instrument—performing it very well too. None of the unmarried girls had the ghost of a chance. Poor Yolande, in her plain pale pink gown, was nowhere. All eyes were directed on the smart little figure at the piano ; on the stylish costume ; the charming profile, with its outward sweep of black lashes ; on the graceful arms and white fingers. For a smile from those clear dark gray eyes, there was not one of the tall youths standing there who would not have sworn to adjure sporting newspapers for the rest of his natural life.

There was only one drawback to the concert, as a concert. To keep the saloon cool the large ports astern had been opened ; and the noise of the water rushing away from the screw was apt to drown the music.

“Miss Winterbourne,” some one said to Yolande—and she started, for she had been sitting at one of the tables, imagining herself alone, and dreaming about the music, “one can hear far better on deck. Won’t you come up and try?”

It was the Master of Lynn.

“Oh yes,” said she ; “thank you.”

She went with him on deck, expecting to find her father there. But Mr. Winterbourne had gone to the smoking-room. No matter. All companions are alike on board ship. Young Leslie brought her a chair, and put it close to the skylight of the saloon ; and he sat down there too. They could hear pretty well ; and they could talk in the intervals. The night was beautifully quiet ; and the moonlight whiter than ever on the decks. These southern nights were soft and fitted for music ; they seemed to blend the singing below and the gentle rushing of the sea all around. And Yolande was so friendly—and frank to plain-spokenness. Once or twice she laughed ; it was a low, quiet, pretty laugh.

Such were the perils of the deep that lay around them as they sailed along those southern seas. And at last they were nearing Malta. On the night before they expected to reach the island Mrs. Graham took occasion to have a quiet chat with her brother.

“Look here, Archie, we shall all be going ashore to-morrow, I suppose,” said she.

"No doubt."

"And I daresay," she added, fixing her clear, pretty, shrewd eyes on him, "that you will be going away to the Club with those young fellows, and we shall see nothing of you."

"We shall be all over the place, I suppose," he answered. "Most likely I shall lunch at the Club. Graham can put me down; he is still a member, isn't he?"

"It would be a good deal more sensible-like," said his sister, "if you gave us lunch at a hotel."

"I?" he cried, with a laugh. "I like that! Considering my income, and Inverstroy's income, a proposal of that kind strikes one with a sort of coolness——"

"I didn't mean Jim and me only," said Mrs. Graham, sharply. "Jim can pay for his own luncheon, and mine too. Why don't you ask the Winterbournes?"

This was a new notion altogether.

"They wouldn't come, would they?" he said, diffidently. "It is not a very long acquaintance. Still, they seem so friendly—and I'd like it awfully—if you think you could get Miss Winterbourne to go with you. Do you think you could, Polly? Don't you see, we ought to pay them a compliment—they've taken Allt-nam-ba."

"Miss Winterbourne," said Mrs. Graham, distantly, "is going ashore with me to-morrow. Of course we must have lunch somewhere. If you men like to go to the Club, very well; I suppose we shall manage."

Well, perhaps it was only a natural thing to suggest. The Winterbournes had been kind to him. Moreover, women do not like to be left to walk up and down the Strada Reale by themselves when they know that their husbands and brothers are enjoying themselves in the Union Club. But it is probable that neither Mrs. Graham nor the young Master of Lynn quite fully recollected that attentions and civilities which are simple and customary on board ship—which are a necessity of the case (people consenting to become intimate and familiar through being constantly thrown together)—may, on land, where one returns to the conventionalities of existence, suddenly assume a very different complexion, and may even appear to have a startling significance.

CHAPTER VII.

A DAY ASHORE.

Most "landward" people, to use the Scotch phrase, would imagine that on board ship ladies would be content with any rough and tumble costume that would serve all purposes from morning till night. But on a long voyage the very reverse is the case. Nowhere else do women dress with more elaborate nicety, and with such studied exhibition of variety as their tolerably capacious wardrobes permit. For one thing, they have no more engrossing occupation. They can spend hours in their cabin devising new combinations; and, as many of them are going to live abroad, they have with them all their worldly gear from which to pick and choose. It is a break in the monotony of the day to have one dress at breakfast, another for forenoon games and lunch, another for the afternoon promenade, another for the meal of state in the evening. Then nowhere else are well-made costumes seen to such advantage; the deck is a wide stage, and there is the best of light for colours. Moreover, in a woman's eyes it is worth while to take trouble about dressing well on board ship; for it is no fleeting glance that rewards her pains. The mere change of a brooch at the neck is noticed.

But all the innocent little displays that had been made during the long voyage were as nothing on board this ship to the grand transformation that took place in view of the landing at Malta. The great vessel was now lying silent and still; her screw no longer throbbing; and instead of the wide, monotonous circle of water around her, here were blue arms of the sea running into the gray-green island; and great yellow bastions along the shore; and over these again a pale white and pink town straggling along the low-lying hills. After breakfast the men-folk were left in undisturbed possession of the deck. *They* were not anxious about their costume—at least, the middle-aged ones were not. They smoked their cigars, and leaned over the rail, and watched the swarm of gaily-painted boats that were waiting to take them ashore. And perhaps some of them were beginning to wish that the

women would look alive ; for already the huge barges filled with coal were drawing near, and soon the vessel would be enveloped in clouds of dust.

Then the women began to come up, one by one ; but all transformed ! They were scarcely recognisable by mere acquaintances. There was about them the look of a Sunday afternoon in Kensington Gardens ; and it was strange enough on the deck of a ship. People who had been on sufficiently friendly terms now grew a little more reserved ; these land costumes reminded them that on shore they might have less claim to a free-and-easy companionship. And Mr. Winterbourne grew anxious. Did Yolande know ? The maid she had brought with her, and whose services she had agreed to share with Mrs. Graham, had been useless enough, from the moment she put foot on board the ship ; but surely she must have learned what was going forward ? Perhaps Yolande would appear in her ordinary pale pink morning dress ? She was far too content with simplicity in costume. Again and again he had had to rebuke her.

“Why don't you have more dresses ?” he had said to her on board this very ship. “Look at Mrs. Graham. Why don't you have as many dresses as Mrs. Graham ? A married lady ? What difference does that make ? I like to see you prettily dressed. When I want you to save money, I will tell you. You can't get them at sea ? Well, of course not ; but you might have got them on shore. And if it meant more trunks, what is the use of Jane ?”

He was a nervous and fidgety man, and he was beginning to be really concerned about Yolande's appearance, when he caught a glimpse of Yolande herself, coming out on to the deck from the companion-way. He was instantly satisfied. There was nothing striking about her dress, it is true—the skirt and sleeves were of dark blue velvet, the rest of dark blue linen, and she wore her white silver belt—but at all events it was different ; and then the flat, dark blue Scotch cap looked pretty enough on her ruddy-golden hair. Indeed, he need not have been afraid that Yolande would have appeared insignificant anyhow or anywhere. Her tall stature ; her slender and graceful figure ; her air and carriage—all these rendered her quite sufficiently distinguished-looking ; even

when one was not near enough to know anything of the fascination of her eyes and the pretty, pathetic mouth.

And yet he was so anxious that she should acquit herself well—he was so proud of her—that he went to her quickly and said—

“That is one of the prettiest of your dresses, Yolande—very pretty—and it suits your silver girdle very well—but the Scotch cap—well, that suits you too, you know——”

“It is Mrs. Graham’s, papa. She asked me to wear it—in honour of Allt-nam-ba.”

“Yes, yes,” he said. “That is all very well—at Allt-nam-ba. It is very pretty—and Jane has done your hair very nicely this morning——”

“I have not had a glimpse of Jane this morning!” Yolande said, with a laugh. “Could I be so cruel? No. Mrs. Graham going ashore—and I to take Jane away?—how could I?”

“I don’t like the arrangement,” her father said, with a frown. “Why should you not have the help of your own maid? But about the cap, Yolande—look, these other ladies are dressed as if they were going to church. The cap would be very pretty at a garden-party—at lawn-tennis—but I think——”

“Oh yes, I will put on a bonnet,” said Yolande, instantly. “It is not to please Mrs. Graham—it is to please you—that I care for. One minute——”

But who was this who intercepted her? Not the lazy young fellow who used to lounge about the decks in a shooting-coat, with a cigarette scarcely ever absent from his fingers or lips; but a most elegant young gentleman in tall hat and frock-coat, who was dressed with the most remarkable precision, from his collar and stiff neck-tie to his snow-white gaiters and patent-leather boots.

“Are you ready to go ashore, Miss Winterbourne?” said he, smoothing his gloves the while. “My sister is just coming up.”

“In one minute,” she said; “I am going for a bonnet, instead of my Scotch cap——”

“Oh no,” he said, quickly; “please don’t. Please, wear the cap. You have no idea how well it becomes you. And

it would be so kind of you to pay a compliment to the Highlands—I think half the officers on board belong to the Seaforth Highlanders—and if we go to look at the Club——”

“No, thank you,” she said, passing him with a friendly smile. “I am not going *en vivandière*. Perhaps I will borrow the cap some other time—at Allt-nam-ba.”

Mr. Winterbourne overheard this little conversation—in fact, the three of them were almost standing together; and whether it was that the general excitement throughout the vessel had also affected him, or whether it was that the mere sight of all these people in different costumes had made him suddenly conscious of what were their real relations—not their ship relations—it certainly startled him to hear the young Master of Lynn, apparently on the same familiar footing as himself, advise Yolande as to what became her. The next step was inevitable. He was easily alarmed. He recalled his friend Shortlands’ remark—which he had rather resented at the time—that a P. and O. voyage would marry off anybody who wanted to get married. He thought of Yolande; and he was stricken dumb with a nameless fear. Was she going away from him? Was some one else about to supplant him in her affections? These two had been in a very literal sense all the world to each other. They had been constant companions. They knew few people; for he lived in a lonely, nomadic kind of way; and Yolande never seemed to care for any society but his own. And now was she going away from him?

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had just arranged to take her away into those wild solitudes in the Highlands, where the Leslies would be their only neighbours. It seemed more and more inevitable. But why not? Why should not this happen? He nerved himself to face the worst. Yolande must marry some day. He had declared to John Shortlands that he almost wished she would marry now. And how could she marry better? This young fellow was of good birth and education; well-mannered and modest; altogether unexceptionable, as far as one could judge. And Mr. Winterbourne had been judging, unconsciously to himself. He had observed in the smoking-room and elsewhere that young Leslie was inclined to be cautious about the expenditure of money—at cards or otherwise; but was not that rather a good trait? The

family were not wealthy; the present Lord Lynn had been engaged all his life in slowly paying off the mortgages on the family estates; and no doubt this young fellow had been economically brought up. And then again—if Yolande were to marry at all—would it not be better that she should be transferred to that distant and safe solitude? Yolande as the mistress of Lynn Towers—far away there in the seclusion of the hills—living a happy and a peaceful life, free from scathe and terror; that was a fancy that pleased him. It seemed not so terrible now that Yolande should marry—at least—at least he would face the worst, and strive to look at the pleasanter aspects of it. She would be far away—and safe.

These anxious, rapid, struggling thoughts had not occupied a couple of minutes. Yolande appeared, and he was almost afraid to regard her. Might there not be something of the future written in her face? Indeed, there was nothing there but a pleasant interest about the going on shore; and when she accepted a little nosegay that the Master of Lynn brought her, and pinned it on her dress, it was with a smile of thanks, but with—to any unconcerned eyes—the very frankest indifference.

The Grahams now announced themselves as ready; and the party descended the gangway into the boat—young Leslie preceding them, so as to hand Yolande into her place.

“Mr. Winterbourne,” said he, when they were all seated under the awning, and sailing away through the lapping green water, “I hope you and your daughter will come and lunch with us——”

“Oh yes, of course,” said he: did they not make one party?

“But what I mean is this,” said the Master of Lynn, “I am giving those Graham people their lunch—the cormorants!—and Lynn towers is a long way off; and I haven’t often the chance of playing host; and so I want you and Miss Winterbourne also to be my guests at the —— Hotel.”

“Oh, thanks; very well,” said Yolande’s father, who had begun now to study this young man with the most observant but cautious scrutiny, and was in a strange kind of way anxious to be pleased with him.

“Why, I thought you were going to the Club they were all

speaking of," said Yolande, staring at him. "Captain Douglas told me so."

"Captain Douglas thinks he knows everything," said young Leslie, good-naturedly; "whereas he knows nothing, except how to play sixpenny loo."

"But we will all go to the Club, Miss Yolande," said Colonel Graham, "and you shall see the ball-room. Very fine. I don't know what the high-art fellows nowadays would think of it. I used to think it uncommonly fine in bygone times. Gad, I'm not so fond of dancing now."

"You can dance as well as ever you did, Jim, only you're so lazy," his wife said, sharply.

"You'll have to give them a torchlight dance, Archie," the Colonel continued, "the first stag Mr. Winterbourne kills. Miss Yolande would like to look at that. And you're pretty good yourself at the sword-dance. I once could do it in a way——"

"Jim, I won't have you talk as if you were an old man," his wife said, angrily. "I don't care about you; I care about myself. I won't have you talk like that. Everybody on board thinks I'm forty."

"You are not so young as you once were, you know, Polly."

But Mrs. Graham was much too radiant a coquette to be put out by any impertinent speech like that. She was too sure of herself. She knew what her glass told her—and the half-concealed admiration of a whole shipful of people. She could afford to treat such speeches with contempt. And so they reached the shore.

They refused to have a carriage; preferring rather to climb away up the steep steps, and away up the steep little streets, until they reached those high and narrow thoroughfares (with their pink and yellow houses, and pretty balconies, and green casements) that were so cool and pleasant to wander through. Sometimes the sun, though shut out, sent a reflected light down into these streets in so peculiar a fashion that the pink fronts of the houses looked quite transparent; and not unfrequently, at the far end of the thoroughfare, the vista was closed in by a narrow band of the deepest and intensest blue—the high horizon-line of the distant sea. They went up to St. John's

bastion, to look at the wilderness of geraniums and lotus-trees. They went to St. John's Church. They went to the telegraph office, where the Master of Lynn sent off this message :—

Archibald Leslie,
— Hotel, Malta.

Ronald MacPherson,
High Street,
Inverness.

Consider Allt-nam-ba, if unlet, taken by Winterbourne, M.P. Slagpool, Seven hundred fifty. Reply.

They went to see the Governor's garden, and, in short, all the sights of the place ; but what charmed the women-folk most of all was, naturally, the great ball-room at the Union Club. As they stood in the big, empty, hollow-resounding place, Yolande said—

“Oh yes, it is beautiful. It must be cool, with such a high roof. Papa, have they as fine a ball-room at the Reform Club?”

“The Reform Club?” her father repeated—rather vexed that she should make such a blunder. “Of course not ! Who ever heard of such a thing !”

“Why not?” she said. “Every one says this is a good club—and very English. Why not at the Reform Club ? Is that why you have never taken me there ?”

“Well, it is ; it is devilish English-looking,” said Colonel Graham to his wife, as they turned into the long cool coffee-room, where there were rows of small tables all nicely furnished out. “I like it. It reminds me of old times. I like to see the fellows in the old uniforms ; it makes one's heart warm. Hanged if I don't have a glass of sherry and bitters just to see if it tastes like the real thing—or a brandy and soda. It's devilish like home. I don't like being waited on by these Lascar-Portuguese-half-nigger fellows. My chap said to me yesterday at breakfast when I asked for poached eggs—‘No go yet—when go bell me bring.’ And another fellow, when I asked for my bath, said, ‘Hot water no go—when go hot water, me tell.’ By Gad, there's old Munro—the fellow that nailed the Sepoys at Azimghur—he's got as fat as a turkey-cock——”

Indeed the members of the Club—mostly officers, apparently—were now coming in to lunch ; and soon Colonel

Graham was fairly mobbed by old friends and acquaintances, insomuch that it was with difficulty he was drawn away to the banquet that young Leslie—taking advantage of the stay of the party in St. John's Church—had had prepared for them at the hotel. It was a modest feast, but merry enough; and the table was liberally adorned with flowers, of which there is no lack in Malta. Colonel Graham was much excited with meeting those old friends, and had a great deal to say about them; his wife was glad to have a rest after so much walking; Yolande was naturally interested in the foreign look of the place and the people; and young Leslie, delighted to have the honour of being host, played that part with much tact and modesty and skill.

To Mr. Winterbourne it was strange. Yolande seemed to half belong to those people already. Mrs. Graham appeared to claim her as a sister. On board ship these things were not so noticeable; for of course they met at meals; and the same groups that were formed at table had a tendency to draw together again on deck or in the saloon. But here was this small party cut off from all the rest of the passengers; and they were entirely on the footing of old friends; and the Master of Lynn's anxiety to please Yolande was most marked and distinct. On board ship it would scarcely have been noticed; here it was obvious to the most careless eye. And yet, when he turned to Yolande herself, who, as might have been imagined, ought to have been conscious that she was being singled out for a very special attention and courtesy, he could read no such consciousness in her face—nothing but a certain pleasant friendliness, and indifference.

After luncheon they went away for a long drive to see more sights; and in the afternoon returned to the hotel, before going on board. Young Leslie was thinking of leaving instructions that the telegram from Inverness should be forwarded on to Cairo when, fortunately, it arrived. It read curiously—

*Ronald MacPherson,
Estate and Colliery Agent,
High Street,
Inverness.*

*The Honourable the Master of Lynn,
Of the P. and O. Company's
Steam-ship —,
The — Hotel, Malta.*

Right.

"Now, what on earth—oh, I see!" exclaimed the recipient of this telegram, after staring at it in a bewildered fashion for a moment. "I see. Here is a most beautiful joke. MacPherson has wanted to be clever. Has found out that telegraphing to Malta is pretty dear; thinks he will make the message as short as possible—but will take it out in the address. I am certain that is it. He has fancied the address was free, as in England; and he has sent his clerk to the office. Won't the clerk catch it when he goes back and says what he has paid! That is real Highland shrewdness. Never mind; you have got the shooting, Mr. Winterbourne."

"I am glad of that," said Yolande's father, rather absently; for now, when he thought of the solitudes of Allt-nam-ba, it was not of stags or grouse or mountain hares that he was thinking.

They got on board again, and almost immediately went below to prepare for dinner, for the decks were still dirty with the coal-dust. And that night they were again at sea—far away in the silences; and a small group of them were up at the end of the saloon, practising glees for the next grand concert. Mr. Winterbourne was on deck, walking up and down, alone; and perhaps trying to fancy how it would be with him when he was really left alone, and Yolande entirely away from him, with other cares and occupations. And he was striving to convince himself that that would be best; that he would himself feel happier if Yolande's future in life were secured,—if he could see her the contented and proud mistress of Lynn Towers. Here, on board this ship, it might seem a hard thing that they should separate, even though the separation were only a mitigated one; but if they were back in England again, he knew those terrible fears would again beset him, and that it would be the first wish of his heart that Yolande should get married. At Lynn Towers he might see her sometimes. It was remote, and quiet, and safe; sometimes Yolande and he would walk together there.

Meanwhile, down below they had finished their practising; and the Master of Lynn was idly turning over a book of glees.

"Polly," said he to his sister, "I like that one as well as any—I mean the words. Don't you think they apply very well to Miss Winterbourne?"

His sister took the book, and read Sheridan's lines—

“Marked you her eye of heavenly blue?
Marked you her cheek of roseate hue?
That eye in liquid circles moving;
That cheek abashed at man's approving;
The one love's arrows darting round,
The other blushing at the wound.”

Well, the music of this glee is charming; and the words are well enough; but when the Master of Lynn ventured the opinion that these were a good description of Yolande, he never made a worse shot in his life. Yolande “abashed at man's approving?” She let no such nonsense get into her head. She was a little too proud for that—or perhaps only careless and indifferent.

CHAPTER VIII.

RECONNAISSANCES.

“I DON'T believe in any such simplicity. Men may; women don't. It seems to me more the simplicity of an accomplished flirt.”

The speaker was Mrs. Graham; and she spoke with an air of resentment.

“You don't know her!” said the Master of Lynn, with involuntary admiration.

“I suppose you think you do,” his sister said, with a “superior” smile. And then—perhaps she was tired of hearing so much in praise of Yolande; or perhaps she wished her brother to be cautious; or perhaps she was merely gratuitously malicious—she said: “I'll tell you what it is—I should not be at all surprised to hear that she was engaged, and has been engaged for any length of time.”

He was struck silent by this fierce suggestion; it bewildered him for a second or two. Then he exclaimed—

“Oh, that is absurd—perfectly absurd! I know she is not!”

“It would be a joke,” continued his sister, with a sardonic

smile, "if that were the explanation of the wonderful friendliness that puzzles you so much. If she is engaged, of course she has no further care or embarrassment. Everything is settled. She is as frank with Dick as with Tom and Harry. Oh, Archie, that would be a joke—how Jim would laugh at you!"

"But it isn't true," he said, angrily, "and you know it isn't. It is quite absurd."

"I will find out for you, if you like," his sister said, calmly; and here the conversation ceased, for Colonel Graham at this moment came along to ask his brother-in-law for a light.

They were again away from the land—perhaps even forgetful that such a thing existed. It seemed quite natural to get up morning after morning to find around them the same bright, brilliant monotony of white-crested blue seas and sunlit decks and fair skies; and each day passed with the usual amusements; and then came the still moonlight night, with all its mysterious charm and loneliness. It was a delightful life—especially for the Grahams and Winterbournes, who were going nowhere in particular, but had come chiefly for the voyage itself. And it was a life the very small incidents of which excited interest, simply because people had plenty of time to consider them—and each other.

There was no doubt that Yolande had become a pretty general favourite; for she found herself very much at home; and she put aside a good deal of that reserve which she assumed in travelling on land. These people could in no sense be considered strangers; they were all too kind to her. The ship's officers brought her the charts out of the chart-room, to show her how far the vessel had got on her course. The captain allowed her to go on the bridge, and gave her his own glass when a distant sail was to be seen. And the young soldiers, when they were not in the smoking-room, and when they were not picking up rope quoits for Mrs. Graham, had an eye on the many strayed birds fluttering about, and when they could they caught one and brought it to Miss Winterbourne, who was glad to take the wild-eyed fluttering wanderer down into the saloon and put its beak for a second or two into a glass of fresh water. The swallows were the most easily caught; they were either more exhausted or more

tame than the quails and thrushes and ringdoves. Once or twice Yolande herself caught one of these swallows ; and the beautiful bronze-blue creature seemed not anxious to get away from her hand. Mrs. Graham said it was too ridiculous to see the Major of a Highland regiment—a man six feet two in height, with a portentously grave face—screw his eyeglass into its place and set off to stalk a dead-tired thrush, pursuing it along the awning and from boat to boat. But all the same, these warriors seemed pleased enough when they could bring to Yolande one of these trembling captives, and when she took the poor thing carefully into her hands, and looked up, and said “Oh, thank you!” It ought to be mentioned that the short upper lip of the girl, though it had the pathetic droop at the corners which has been mentioned—and which an artist friend of the writer says ought to have been described as Cupid’s bow being drawn slightly—lent itself very readily to a smile.

Mrs. Graham watched for a chance of speaking to Yolande, and soon found it. She went to the girl, who was standing by the rail of the hurricane-deck, and put her arm most affectionately round her, and said—

“My dear child, what are you staring into the sea for? Do you expect to see dolphins?”

“I was wondering what made the water so blue,” said she, raising herself somewhat. “It is not the sky. If you look at the water for a while, and turn to the sky, the sky is a pale washed-out purple. What a wonderful blue it is, too ; it seems to me twenty times more intense than the blue of the water along the Riviera.”

“You have been along the Riviera?”

“Oh, two or three times,” said Yolande. “We always go that way into Italy.”

“You must have travelled a great deal, from what I hear.”

“Yes,” said Yolande, with a slight sigh, “I am afraid it is a great misfortune. It is papa’s kindness to me ; but I am sorry. It takes him away. At one time he said it was my education ; but now we both laugh at that—for a pretence. Oh, I assure you we are such bad travellers—we never go to see anything that we ought to see. When we go to Venice, we go to the Lido, and the sands—but to the churches?—no.

In Egypt you will have to do all the sight-seeing : you will find us—oh, so very lazy that you cannot imagine it ; you will go and see the tombs and the inscriptions, and papa and I, we will take a walk and look at the river until you come back.”

“What a strange life to have led,” said her friend, who had her own point in view. “And among all your wanderings, did you never meet the one who is to be nearer and dearer——?”

“Nearer and dearer?” said Yolande, looking puzzled. “Papa is nearer and dearer to me than any one or anything—naturally. That is why we are always satisfied to be together ; that is what makes our travelling so consoling—no—so—so contented.”

“But what I mean is—now forgive me, dear Yolande—you know I’m a very impertinent woman—I mean, in all your travels have you never come across some one whom you would care to marry? Indeed, indeed, you must have met many a one who would have been glad to carry you off—that I can tell you without flattery.”

“Indeed, not any one?” said Yolande, with a perfectly frank laugh. “That is not what I would ever think of. That is not what I wish.” And then she added, with an air of sadness : “Perhaps I am never to have what I wish—it is a pity—a misfortune.”

“What is it, then, dear Yolande? In your father’s position I don’t see what there is in the world that he could not get for you. You see I am curious—I am very impertinent—but I should like to treat you like my own sister—I am not quite old enough to act as a mother to you, for all that Jim says.”

“Oh, it is simple enough—it does not sound difficult,” Yolande said. “Come, we will sit down and I will tell you.”

They sat down in two deck-chairs that happened to be handy, and Mrs. Graham took the girl’s hand in hers ; because she really liked her, although at times human nature broke down, and she thought her husband was carrying his praises of Yolande just a trifle too far.

“When I have met English ladies abroad,” said Yolande, “and the one or two families I know in London, it was so nice to hear them talk of their home—perhaps in the country,

where every one seemed to know them, and they had so many interests, so many affections. They were proud of that. It was a tie. They were not merely wanderers. Even your brother, dear Mrs. Graham, he has filled me with envy of him, when he has told me of the district around Lynn Towers, and seeming to know every one, and always settled there, and capable to make friends for a lifetime, not for a few hours in a hotel. What place do I really know in the world—what place do they really know me?—a little village in France that you never heard of! And I am English! I am not French. Ah yes, that is what I have many a time wished—that my papa would have a house like others—in the country?—yes—or in the town?—yes—what does that matter to me? And I should make it pretty for him; and he would have a home—not a hotel; also I have thought of being a secretary to him, but perhaps that is too much beyond what is possible. Do you think I can imagine anything about marrying when this far more serious thing is what I wish? Do you think that any one can be nearer and dearer to me than the one who has given me all his affection, all his life, who thinks only of me, who has sacrificed already far too much for me? Who else has done that for me? And you would not have me ungrateful? Besides, also, it is selfish. I do not like the society of any one nearly so much; why should I change for a stranger? But it is not necessary to speak of that—it is a stupidity—but now I have told you what I wish for, if it were possible.”

Mrs. Graham was convinced. There was no affectation here. The Master of Lynn had no rival, at all events.

“Do you know, my dear child, you talk very sensibly,” said she, patting her hand. “And I don’t see why your papa should not give you two homes—one in the country and one in town,—for I am sure every one says he is wealthy enough. But perhaps this is the reason. Of course you will marry—no, stay a minute—I tell you you are sure to marry. Why, the idea! Well, then, in that case, it might be better for your papa not to have a household to break up; he could attend to his Parliamentary duties very well if he lived in the Westminster Palace Hotel, for example, and be free from care——”

Yolande’s mouth went very far down this time.

"Yes, that may be it," she said. "Perhaps that will happen. I know I have taken away too much of his time ; and once, twice perhaps, we have had jokes about my being married ; but this was the end, that when my papa tells me to marry, then I will marry. I must go somewhere. If I am too much of a burden—and sometimes I am very sad and think that I am—then he must go and bring some one to me, and say 'Marry him.' And I will marry him—and *hate him*."

"Gracious Heavens, child, what are you saying? Of course if ever you should marry, you will choose for yourself."

"It is not my affair," said Yolande, coldly. "If I am to go away, I will go away, but I shall hate the one that takes me away."

"Yolande," said her friend, seriously, "you are making it rather hard for your father. Perhaps I have no right to interfere ; but you have no mother to guide you, and really you talk such—such absurdity——"

"But how do I make it hard for my papa?" said Yolande, quickly looking up with an anxious glance. "Am I a constraint? Do you think there is something he would do? Am I in his way—a burden to him?"

"No, no, no," said the other, good-humouredly. "Why should you think any such thing? I was only referring to the madness of your own fancy. The idea that your father is to choose a husband for you—whom you will hate! Now suppose that you are a burden—I believe I informed you that I was a very impertinent woman, and now I am an inter-meddler as well—suppose that your father would like to take a more active part in public affairs, and that he knows you are opposed to the very notion of getting married. He is in a very painful dilemma. He won't tell you that you are rather interfering with his Parliamentary work. And most assuredly he won't recommend you to marry any one, if you are going to marry with a deadly grudge against your husband."

Yolande thought over this for some minutes.

"I suppose it is true," she said, rather sadly. "He would not tell me. He has said I kept him away from the House of Commons ; but then it was only amusement and joking. And I—I also—have many a time been fearing it was not right he should waste so much care on me, when no one else

does that with their daughters. Why does he go to the House? Partly because it is his duty to work for the country—to see that it is well-governed; partly to make fame, which is a noble ambition. And then I interfere. He thinks I am not quite well when I am quite well. He thinks I am dull when I am not dull—when I would rather read his speech in the newspapers than go anywhere. But always the same—I must go and be amused, and Parliament and everything is left behind. It was not so bad when I was at the Château; then I was learning; but even then he was always coming to see me and to take me away. And when I used to say, ‘Papa, why don’t you take me to England? I am English; I want to see my own country, not other countries;’—it was always: ‘You will see enough of England by and by.’ But when I go to England, look! it is the same—always away again, except a week or two, perhaps, at Oatlands Park, or a day or two in London; and I have not once been to the House of Commons, where every one goes, and even my papa is vexed that I do not know they have not a ball-room at the Reform Club!”

“Well, dear Yolande, you have led a queer sort of life; but, after all, was not your father wise? He could not have a household with a schoolgirl to look after it. But now I can see that all this will be changed; and you will have no more fears that you are a restraint. Of course you will marry, and you will be very happy; and your papa will have your home to go to at the Easter holidays; and you will go up to town to hear him speak in the House; and he will have a fair chance in politics. So that is all arranged, and you are not to have any wild or fierce theories. There goes dressing-bell; come along!”

Day after day passed without change. The young Master of Lynn had been reassured by his sister; and very diligently, and with a Jacob-like modesty and patience, he strove to win Yolande’s regard; but although she was always most friendly towards him and pleased to chat with him, or walk the hurricane-deck with him, she seemed to treat him precisely as she treated any of the others. If there was one whom she especially favoured, it was Colonel Graham, whose curt, sardonic speeches amused her.

At last they arrived at Port Said, that curious, rectangular-streeted, shanty-built place, that looks like Cheyenne painted pink and white; and of course there was much wonder and interest in beholding land again, and green water, and the swarming boats with their Greeks and Maltese and Negroes and Arabs, all in their various costumes. But it was with a far greater interest that they regarded the picture around them when the vessel had started again, and was slowly and silently stealing away into the wide and lonely desert land, by means of this water highway. The Suez Canal had been rather a commonplace phrase to Yolande—mixed up with monetary affairs mostly, and suggestive of machinery. But all this was strange and new; and the vessel was going so slowly that the engines were scarcely heard; she seemed to glide into this dream-world of silver sky and far-reaching wastes of yellow sand. It was so silent, and so wide, and so lonely. For the most part the horizon-line was a mirage; and they watched the continual undulation of the silver-white waves, and even the strange reflections of what appeared to be islands; but here there was not even a palm to break the monotony of the desert—only the little tamarisk bushes dotting the sand. From a marsh a red-legged flamingo rose, slowly winging its way to the south. Then a string of camels came along with forward-stretching heads, and broad, slow-pacing feet; the Bedouins either perched on the backs of the animals or striding through the sand by their side, their faces looking black in contrast to their white wide-flowing garments. And so they glided through the silent, gray, silver world.

The night saw another scene. They were anchored in a narrow part of the canal where the banks were high and steep; and the moonlight was surpassingly vivid. On one of these banks—it seemed a great mountain as it rose to the dark blue vault where the stars were—the moonlight threw the shadow of the rigging of the ship so sharply that every spar and rope was traced on the silver-clear sand. There was an almost oppressive silence in this desert solitude; a dark animal that came along through the tamarisk bushes—some said it was a jackal—disappeared up and over the sand-mountain like a ghost. And in the midst of this weird, cold moonlight and silence these people began to get up a dance after dinner.

The piano was brought on deck from the saloon. The women-folk had put on their prettiest costumes. There had been, perhaps (so it was said), a little begging and half-promising going on beforehand. The smoking-room was deserted. From the supports of the awnings a number of large lanterns had been slung ; so that when the ladies began to appear, and when the first notes of the music were heard, the scene was a very animated and pretty one, but so strange with the moonlit desert around.

The Master of Lynn had got hold of Yolande—he had been watching for her appearance.

“I hope you will give me a dance, Miss Winterbourne,” said he.

“Oh yes, with pleasure,” said she, in the most friendly way.

“There are no programmes, of course,” said he, “and one can’t make engagements ; but I think a very good rule in a thing like this is that one should dance with one’s friends. For myself, I don’t care to dance with strangers. It doesn’t interest me. I think when people form a party among themselves on board ship—well, I think they should keep to themselves——”

“Oh, but that is very selfish, is it not ?” Yolande said. “We are not supposed to be strangers with any one after being on board ship so long together——”

“Miss Winterbourne, may I have the pleasure of dancing this waltz with you ?” said a tall solemn man with an eye-glass ; and the next minute the Master of Lynn beheld Yolande walking towards that cleared space with Major Mackinnon, of the Seaforth Highlanders, and as to what he thought of the Seaforth Highlanders, and what he hoped would happen to them, from their colonel down to their pipe-major, it is unnecessary to say anything here.

But Yolande did give him the next dance, which mollified him a little—not altogether, however, for it was only a square. The next was a Highland Schottische ; and by ill-luck he took it for granted that Yolande, having been brought up in France, would know nothing about it, so he went away and sought out his sister. Their performance was the feature of the evening. No one else thought of interfering. And it was very cleverly, and prettily, and artistically done ; insomuch that a round of

applause greeted them at the end—even from the young Highland officers, who considered that young Leslie might just as well have sought a partner elsewhere, instead of claiming his own sister. Immediately after the Master of Lynn returned to Yolande.

“Ah, that is very pretty,” she said. “No wonder they approved you and clapped their hands. It is the most picturesque of all the dances—especially when there are only two, and you have the whole deck for display. In a ball-room, perhaps no.”

“You must learn it, Miss Winterbourne, before you come north,” said he. “We always dance it in the north.”

“Oh, but I know it very well,” said Yolande, quietly.

“You?” said he, in an injured way. “Why didn’t you tell me? Do you think I wanted to dance with my sister and leave you here?”

“But Mrs. Graham and you danced it so prettily—oh, very well, indeed——”

There was somebody else approaching them now—for the lady at the piano had that instant begun another waltz. This was Captain Douglas, also of the Seaforth Highlanders.

“Miss Winterbourne, if you are not engaged, will you give me this waltz?”

Yolande did not hesitate. Why should she? She was not engaged.

“Oh yes, thanks,” said she, with much friendliness, and she rose and took Captain Douglas’ arm.

But young Leslie could not bear this perfidy, as he judged it. He would have no more to do with the dance or with her. Without a word to any one he went away to the smoking-room and sat down there, savage and alone. He lit a cigar and smoked vehemently.

“Polly talks about men being bamboozled by women,” he was thinking bitterly. “She knows nothing about it. It is women who know nothing about women; they hide themselves from each other. But she was right on one point. That girl is the most infernal flirt that ever stepped the earth.”

And still, far away, he could hear the sound of the music, and also the stranger sound—like a whispering of silken wings—of feet on the deck. He was angry and indignant. Yolande could not be blind to his constant devotion to her; and yet

she treated him exactly as if he were a stranger—going off with the first-comer! Simplicity! His sister was right—it was the simplicity of a first-class flirt.

And still the waltz went on, and he heard the winnowing sound of the dancers' feet; and his thoughts were bitter enough. He was only five-and-twenty; at that age hopes and fears and disappointments are emphatic and near; probably it never occurred to him to turn from the vanities of the hour, and from the petty throbbing anxieties and common-places of everyday life, to think of the awful solitudes all around him there—the voiceless, world-old desert lying so dim and strange under the moonlight and the stars, its vast and mysterious heart quite pulseless and calm.

CHAPTER IX.

CLOUDS.

NEXT morning, quite unconscious that she had dealt any deadly injury to any one, Yolande was seated all by herself on the hurricane-deck, idly and carelessly and happily drinking in fresh clear air and looking away over the wastes of golden sand to a strip of intense dark blue that was soon to reveal itself as the waters of a lake. She was quite alone. The second officer had brought her one of the ship's glasses, and had then (greatly against his will) gone on the bridge again. The morning was fair and shining; the huge steamer was going placidly and noiselessly through the still water; if Yolande was thinking of anything it was probably that she had never seen her father so pleased and contented as on this long voyage; and perhaps she was wondering whether, after all, it might not be quite as well that he should give up Parliament altogether, so that they two might wander away through the world, secure in each other's company.

Nor was she aware that, at this precise moment, her future was being accurately arranged for her in one of the cabins below.

"I confess I don't see where there can be the least objection," Mrs. Graham was saying to her husband (who

was still lying in his berth, turning over the pages of a novel), as she fixed a smart mob-cap on her short and pretty curls. "I have looked at it every way. Papa may make a fuss about Mr. Winterbourne's politics; but there are substantial reasons why he should say as little as possible. Just think how he has worked at the improving of the estate all his life, and with scarcely any money; and just fancy Archie coming in to complete the thing. I know what I would do. I would drain and plant the Rushen slopes, and build a nice lodge there; and then I would take the sheep off Allt-nam-ba and make it a small forest; and it would let for twice as much again. Oh, Jim, just fancy if Archie were to be able to buy back Corrievreak!"

Her husband flung the book aside, and put his hands under his head. His imagination was at work.

"If I were Archie," he said, with his eyes fixed on vacancy, "I would make Corrievreak the sanctuary; that's what I would do. Then I would put a strip of sheep up the Glenbuie side to fence off Sir John—do you see that, Polly? And then I would take the sheep off Allt-nam-ba, as you say, only I would add on Allt-nam-ba to Lynn. Do you see that? What made your grandfather part with Corrievreak I don't know. Fancy having the sanctuary within two miles of a steam-boat pier; it's a standing temptation to all the poachers in the country! Now, if you take in Allt-nam-ba and make Corrievreak the sanctuary, and if you'd hold your hand for a year or two in the letting, you'd soon have one of the best forests in Scotland. But letting is the mischief. Those fellows from the south shoot anything on four legs they can get at. Forty years ago the finest stags in Inverness-shire were found round and about Corrievreak—the Fort Augustus lads knew that—they used to say. Oh, I quite agree with you. I think it would be an uncommon good match. And then Archie would have a house in town, I suppose; and they might put us up for a week or two in the season. Tit for tat's fair play. He has the run of Inverstroy when there isn't a bit of rabbit-shooting left to him at Lynn."

"Well, but there's just this, you know, Jim," his wife said, with an odd kind of smile: "We know very little about what kind of girl she is, and Archie knows less than we do."

"Oh, she's well enough," said the stout soldier, carelessly. That was a subsidiary point. What his mind clearly grasped was the importance of having Corrievreak made the sanctuary of the deer forest.

"She is well enough, no doubt," his wife said ; and as she had finished her toilet she now stood and regarded him with a demure kind of hesitation in her face, as if she were afraid to confess her thoughts. "She is well enough. She has good manners. She is distinguished-looking for a girl of her age ; and you know all the money in Slagpool wouldn't induce papa to receive a dowdy daughter-in-law. And she doesn't flirt, unless—well, it's just possible she knows that that indifference of hers is attractive to young men ; it puts them on their mettle and touches their vanity. But after all, Jim, we know very little about the girl. We don't know what sort of a wife she would make. She has come through nothing, less than most girls ; for she might as well have been in a convent as in that Château. And of course she can't expect life always to be as pleasant for her ; and—and—she has come through no crisis to show what kind of stuff she is made of, and we might all be mistaken——"

"Oh, I see what you're driving at," her husband said, with just a touch of contempt. "Don't be alarmed : I daresay Archie isn't anxious to marry a tragedy queen. I don't see why Miss Winterbourne should be put to any fiery trial, or should have to go through mortal agonies, any more than the majority of young women in exceptionally easy circumstances. And if she should, I have no doubt she will show common sense ; and men prefer common sense to hysterics—a long way. I think she has common sense ; and I don't see why she and Archie shouldn't marry, and have a pleasant enough time of it ; and I suppose they will quarrel until one or other gets tired of quarrelling, and refuses ; and if they only have a tidy little house about Bruton Street or Conduit Street, and a good cook, it will be very convenient for us. Now I wish to goodness you'd clear out and let me get dressed."

The dismissal was summary ; but pretty Mrs. Graham was a good-natured woman ; and with much equanimity she left the cabin, made her way along the saloon, and up the companion-way to the outer air. About the first

person she ran against was her brother; and black thunder was on his face.

"Where is Miss Winterbourne?" she said, inadvertently, and without reflecting that the question was odd.

"On the hurricane-deck," said he. "I daresay you will find half the officers of the ship round her."

There was something in his tone which caused his sister, with considerable sharpness, to ask him what he meant; and then out came the story of his wrongs. Now Mrs. Graham had not been too well pleased when her husband and everybody else sang the praises of Yolande to her; but no sooner was the girl attacked in this way than she instantly—and with a good deal of warmth—flew to her defence. What right had he to suppose that Miss Winterbourne ought to have singled him out as different from the others? Why should she not dance with whomsoever she pleased? If the ship's officers showed her some little ordinary courtesies, why should she not be civil in return? What right of possession had he in her? What was he to her in any way whatever?

"You said yourself she was a flirt," her brother retorted.

"I?" she said. "I? I said nothing of the kind! I said that the preposterous innocence that you discovered in her was more like the innocence of a confirmed flirt. But that only shows me that you know nothing at all about her. To imagine that she should have kept all her dances for you——"

"I imagine nothing of the sort," he answered, with equal vehemence. "But I imagined that as we were travelling together as friends, even a small amount of friendliness might have been shown. But it is no matter——"

"You are quite right, it is no matter," she interrupted. "I have no doubt Miss Winterbourne will find plenty to understand her character a little better than you seem to do. You seem to think that you should have everything—that everything should be made smooth and pleasant for you. I suppose, when you marry, you will expect your wife to go through life with her ball-room dress on. It isn't her womanly nature that you will be thinking of; but whether she dresses well enough to make other women envious!"

All this was somewhat incoherent; but there was a confused recollection in her brain of what she had been saying to her

husband, and also, perhaps, a vague impression that these words were exculpating herself from certain possible charges.

"You don't consider whether a woman is fit to stand the test of suffering and trouble : do you think she is always going to be a pretty doll to sit at the head of your dinner-table? You think you know what Yolande's nature is ; but you know nothing about it. You know that she has pretty eyes, perhaps ; and you get savage when she looks at any one else——"

She turned quickly away : Yolande had at that moment appeared at the top of the steps. And when she came down to the deck, Mrs. Graham caught her with both hands, and kissed her, and still held her hands, and regarded her most affectionately.

"Dear Yolande, how well you are looking !" she exclaimed (meaning that her brother should hear ; but he had walked away). "Dissipation does not harm you a bit. But indeed a dance on the deck of a ship is not like a dance in town——"

Yolande glanced around ; there was no one by.

"Dear Mrs. Graham," said she, "I have a secret to ask you. Do you think your brother would do me a great favour? Dare I ask him?"

"Why—yes—of course," said the other, with some hesitation and a little surprise. "Of course he would be delighted."

She could see that Yolande, at least, knew nothing of the fires of rage or jealousy she had kindled.

"I will tell you what it is, then. I wish my papa to think that I can manage—oh, everything !—when we go to the house in the Highlands. I wish that he may have no trouble or delay ; that everything should be quite ready and quite right. Always he has said, 'Oh, you are a child ; why do you want a house? Why should you have vexation?' But, dear Mrs. Graham, I do not mind the trouble at all ; and I am filled with joy when I think of the time I am to go to the shops in Inverness ; and papa will see that I can remember everything that is wanted ; and he will have no bother at all ; and he will see that I can look after a house, and then he will not be so afraid to take one in London or the country, and to have a proper home, as every one else has. And this is what I would ask of your brother, if he will be so very kind ; he will be at Inverness before any of us, I suppose?"

"No doubt; but why should you look so far ahead, Yolande, and trouble yourself?"

"It is no trouble; it is a delight. You were speaking of the carriage we should want and the horses, to drive between Allt-nam-ba and the steamboat pier. Now all the other things that I have made a list of——"

"Already?"

"When you were so good as to tell me them, I put them down on a sheet of paper—it is safer; but the carriage: do you think I might ask your brother to hire that for us for the three months? Then when papa goes to Inverness, there will be no bother or waiting; everything in readiness; the carriage and horses engaged; the dogs sent on before; the cook at the lodge, with luncheon ready, or dinner, if it is late; all the bedroom things nicely aired; all right—everything right. Do you think I might ask Mr. Leslie? Do you think he would be so kind?"

"Oh, I am sure he would be delighted," said Mrs. Graham (with some little misgiving about Archie's existing mood). "I fancy he has promised to get your papa a couple of ponies for the game panniers; and he might as well get you a dog-cart at the same time. I should say a four-wheeled dog-cart and one stout serviceable horse would be best for you; with perhaps a spring-cart and an additional pony—to trot in with the game to the steamer. But Archie will tell you. It sounds so strange to talk about such things—here. Jim and I had a chat about the Highlands this very morning."

"I will speak to your brother after breakfast, then."

But after breakfast, as it turned out, the Master of Lynn was nowhere to be found. Yolande wondered that he did not as usual come up on the hurricane-deck to play "Bull," or have a promenade with her; but thought he was perhaps writing letters in the saloon, to be posted that night at Suez. She did not like to ask; she only waited. She played "Bull" with her father, and got sadly beaten. She had a smart promenade with Colonel Graham, who told her some jungle stories; but she was thinking of the Highlands all the time. She began to be impatient; and set to work to devise letters, couched in such business phraseology as she knew, requesting a firm of livery-stable keepers to state their terms for the hire

of a dog-cart and horse for three months, the wages of the groom included.

There was no need to hurry. There had been some block in the Canal ; and the huge bulk of the ship was now lying idly in the midst of the Greater Bitter Lake. All around them was the wide plain of dazzling blue-green water ; and beyond that the ruddy brown strip of the desert quivered in the furnace-like heat ; while overhead shone the pale clear sky, cloudless and breathless. Yolande, as usual, wore neither hat nor bonnet ; but she was less reckless in venturing from under shelter of the awnings. And some of the old Anglo-Indians were hoping that the punkah-wallahs would be set to work at dinner-time.

The Master of Lynn had not shown up at breakfast ; but he made his appearance at lunch ; and he greeted Yolande with a cold "Good-morning," and a still colder bow. Yolande, in truth, did not notice any change in his manner at first ; but by and by she could not fail to perceive that he addressed the whole of his conversation to Colonel Graham, and that he had not a single word for her, though he was sitting right opposite to her. Well, she thought, perhaps this question as to whether they were to get through to Suez that evening was really very important. It did not much matter to her. She was more interested in Inverness than in Suez ; and among the most prized of her possessions was a long list of things necessary for a shooting-lodge, apart from the supplies which she was to send from the Army and Navy Stores. She felt she was no longer a schoolgirl ; nor even a useless and idle wanderer. Her father should see what she could do. Was he aware that she knew that ordinary blacking was useless for shooting boots ; and that she had got "dubbing" down in her list ?

"Archie," said Mrs. Graham to her brother, the first time she got hold of him after lunch ; "you need not be rude to Miss Winterbourne."

"I hope I have not been," said he, somewhat stiffly.

"You treated her as if she were an absolute stranger at lunch. Not that I suppose she cares. But, for your own sake, you might show better manners."

"I think you mistake the situation," said he, with apparent

indifference. " 'Do as you're done by' is a very good motto. It is for her to say whether we are to be friends, acquaintances, or strangers: and if she chooses to treat you on the least favoured nation scale, I suppose you've got to accept that. It is for her to choose. It is a free country."

"I think you are behaving abominably. I suppose you are jealous of those young officers; men who are not in the army always are; they know women like a man who can fight——"

"Fight! Smoke cigarettes and play sixpenny Nap, you mean! That's about all the fighting they've ever done!"

"Do you say that about Jim?" said the young wife, with a flash of indignation in her eyes. "Why——"

"I wasn't aware that Graham was a candidate for Miss Winterbourne's favours," said he.

"Well, now," she said, "you are making a fool of yourself, all to no purpose. If you are jealous of them, won't you be rid of the whole lot of them to-night, supposing we get to Suez? And we shall be all by ourselves after that; and I am sure I expected we should make such a pleasant and friendly party."

"But I am quite willing," said he. "If I meet Miss Winterbourne on terms of her own choosing, surely that is only leaving her the liberty she is entitled to. There is no quarrel, Polly. Don't be aghast. If Miss Winterbourne wishes to be friendly, good and well; if not, good and better. No bones will be broken."

"I tell you this, at least," said his sister, as a parting warning or entreaty, "that she is perfectly unconscious of having given you any offence. She has been anxious to speak to you all day, to ask you for a favour. She wants you to hire a dog-cart and a spring-cart for them, when you go to Inverness. If she thought there was anything the matter, would she ask a favour of you?"

"There is nothing the matter," he rejoined, with perfect equanimity. "And I am quite willing to hire any number of dog-carts for her—when she asks me."

But, oddly enough, whether it was that Yolande had detected something unusual in his manner, or whether that item in her list of preparations had for the moment escaped her memory, or whether it was that the ship had again started, and everybody was eagerly looking forward to reaching Suez that

night, nothing further was then said of the request that Yolande had intended to make. Indeed, she had but little opportunity of speaking to him that afternoon; for most of her time was taken up in finally getting ready for quitting the big steamer, and in helping Mrs. Graham to do likewise. When they did reach Suez, it was just dinner-time, and that meal was rather hurried over; for there were many good-byes to be said, and people could be got at more easily on deck.

The clear hot evening was sinking into the sudden darkness of the Egyptian night when the Grahams and Winterbournes got into the railway carriage that was to take them along to the hotel; and a whole crowd of passengers had come ashore to bid them a last good-bye, amongst them notably the young Highland officers.

"Lucky beggars!" said Colonel Graham, rather ruefully. "Don't you wish you were going out, Polly? Wouldn't you like to be going out again?"

"Not I. Think of dear Baby, Jim!"

"By Jove!" said he, "if Colin Mackenzie were here with his pipes to play *The Barren Rocks of Aden*, I believe I'd go. I believe nothing could keep me."

And so they bade good-bye to those boys; and Mrs. Graham and Yolande found themselves overladen with fruit and flowers when the train started. They were tired after so much excitement, and very soon went to bed after reaching the hotel.

Next morning they set out for Cairo; the Master quite courteous, in a reserved kind of way; his sister inwardly chafing; Yolande perhaps a trifle puzzled. Colonel Graham and Mr. Winterbourne, on the other hand, knowing nothing of these subtle matters, were wholly engrossed by the sights without. For though at first there was nothing but the vast monotony of the Desert—a blazing stretch of sun-brown, with perhaps, now and again, a string of camels looking quite black on the far horizon-line—that in time gave way to the wide and fertile plains of the Nile valley. Slowly enough the train made its way through these teeming plains, with all their strange features of Eastern life—the mud-built villages among the palms; herds of buffaloes coming down to wallow in the river; oxen trampling out the corn in the open; camels slowly pacing along in Indian file, or here and there tethered to a tree;

strange birds flying over the interminable breadths of golden grain. And, of course, when they reached Cairo, that wonderful city was still more bewildering to European eyes—the picturesque forms and brilliant costumes; the gaily caparisoned donkeys, ridden by veiled women, whose black eyes gleamed as they passed; the bare-legged runner, with his long wand clearing the way for his master on horseback; the swarthy Arabs leading their slow-moving camels; and side by side with the mosques and minarets and Moorish houses, the French-looking cafés and shops, to say nothing of the French-looking public gardens, with the European servant-maids and children listening to tinkling music from the latest Parisian comic opera.

Then they got them to a large hotel, fronting these public gardens, the spacious hall and corridors of which were gratefully cool; while outside there was such a mass of verdure—flowering shrubs and palms, wide-leaved bananas, and here and there a giant eucalyptus—as was exceedingly pleasant to eyes long accustomed to only the blue of the sea and the yellow-white of the deck. Moreover they were in ample time for the *table d'hôte*; and every one, after the dust and heat, was glad to have a thorough change of raiment.

When the guests assembled in the long and lofty dining-saloon (there were not many, for most of the Spring tourists had already left, while many of the European residents in Cairo had gone away, anticipating political troubles), it was clear that Mrs. Graham and her younger companion had taken the opportunity of donning a shore toilette. Mrs. Graham's costume was certainly striking; it was a deep crimson, of some richly-brocaded stuff; and she had some red flowers in her black hair. Yolande's was simpler: the gown a muslin of white or nearly white; and the only colour she wore was a bit of light salmon-coloured silk that came round her neck, and was fastened in a bow in front. She had nothing in her hair; but the light falling on it from above was sufficient, and even glorious, adornment. For jewellery she had two small earrings, each composed of minute points of pale turquoise; perhaps these only served to show more clearly the exquisite purity of her complexion, where the soft oval of the cheek met the ear.

"By heavens," the Master of Lynn said to himself, the

moment he had seen her come in at the wide door, "that girl is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen!"

He was startled into renewed admiration of her. He could not keep his eyes away from her; he found himself listening with a quick sympathy and approval when she spoke; and as her face was all lit up with excitement and gladness because of the strange things she had seen, he followed her varying expressions, and found himself being helplessly drawn under a witchery which he could not and did not strive much to withstand. She spoke mostly—and she was pleasantly excited and talkative this evening—to her father and to Mrs. Graham; but sometimes, perhaps inadvertently, she glanced his way as she spoke, and then he eagerly agreed with what she was saying before he knew what it was. She, at least, had no covert quarrel with him or with any one else. Delight shone in her eyes. When she laughed it was like music. Even her father thought that she was looking unusually bright and happy; and so that made him very contented, too; but his satisfaction took the form of humorous grumbling; and he declared that he didn't know what she was made of—that she should be making merry after a long day's heat and dust, that had nearly killed every one else.

After dinner they all flocked into the reading-room, anxious to have a look at the English papers—all except the Master of Lynn, who left the hotel, and was absent for a little time. When he returned he went into the reading-room, and (with a certain timidity) went up to Yolande.

"Miss Winterbourne," said he, not very loudly, "wouldn't it be pleasanter for you to sit outside and see the people passing? It is very interesting; and they are playing music in the gardens. It is much cooler out-of-doors."

"Oh yes," said Yolande, without the least hesitation; and instantly she rose and walked out, just as she was, on to the terrace, he modestly attending her. He brought her a chair, and she sat down by the railings to watch the picturesque crowd. She spoke to him just in her usual way.

"Miss Winterbourne," said he, at length, "I have got you a little case of attar of roses; will you take it? When you get home, if you put it in your wardrobe, it will last a long time; and it is sure to remind you of Cairo."

"When I get home?" she repeated, rather sadly. "I have no home. I do not understand it. I do not understand why my papa should not have a home, as other people have."

"Well, then, will you take it to Allt-nam-ba?" said he. "That will be your home for a while."

At the mere mention of the place her face brightened up.

"Oh yes," she said, in the most friendly way, "that will indeed be a home for us for a while. Oh, thank you—it is very kind of you; I shall prize it very much——"

"And Polly was saying you wanted me to take some commissions for you to Inverness," said he, abasing himself to the uttermost. "I should be awfully glad. I should be delighted——"

"Oh, will you?" she said—and she rewarded him with an upward glance of gratitude that drove Cairo, and Inverness, and dog-carts, and everything else, clean out of his head. "And you are not anxious to read the newspapers?"

"No—not at all."

"Then will you sit down and tell me a little more about Allt-nam-ba? Ah, you do not know how I look forward to it. If it is only for three months, still it is a home, as you say—all to ourselves; and my papa and I have never been together like that before. I am so glad to think of it; and I am frightened, too, in case I do anything wrong; but your sister has been very kind to me. And there is another thing—if I make mistakes at the beginning—well I believe my papa does not know how to be angry with me."

"Well, I should think not—I should think not, indeed!" said he, as if it were quite an impossible thing for anybody to be angry with Yolande.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE NIGHT.

He had at last discovered an easy way of gaining her favour. She was so anxious to prove to her father that she was a

capable house-mistress that she was profoundly grateful for any hint that might help ; and she spared neither time nor trouble in acquiring the most minute information. Then all this had to be done in a more or less secret fashion. She wished the arrangements at the shooting-lodge to be something of a surprise. Her father, on getting up to Inverness-shire, was to find everything in perfect order ; then he would see whether or not she was fit to manage a house. She had even decided (after serious consultation with the Master of Lynn) that when the gillies went up the hill with the shooting party, she would give them their lunch rather than the meaner alternative of a shilling a piece ; and when the Master suggested that oatcake and cheese were quite sufficient for that, she said no—that, as her father, she knew, would not have either whisky or beer about the place, she would make it up to the men in giving them a good meal.

This decision was arrived at, of all places in the world, in the gimcrack wooden building that Ismail had put up at the foot of the Great Pyramid for the reception of his guests. The Grahams and Winterbournes had, as a matter of course, driven out to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx ; but when there was a talk of their climbing to the top of the Great Pyramid, Yolande flatly refused to be hauled about by the Arabs ; so that Mrs. Graham (who had her little ambitions) and her husband and Mr. Winterbourne started by themselves, leaving the Master of Lynn, who eagerly accepted the duty, to keep Yolande company. And so these two were now sitting well content in this big, bare, cool apartment, the chief ornament of which was a series of pictures on the wall—landscapes, in fact, so large and wild and vehement in colour that one momentarily expected to hear a sharp whistle, followed by carpenters rushing in to run them off the stage.

“ I suppose, Miss Winterbourne,” said he (it was an odd kind of conversation to take place at the foot of the Great Pyramid), “ your father would like to kill a few red-deer while he is at Allt-nam-ba ? ”

“ Oh yes ; I know he is looking forward to that.”

“ Do you think,” said he, with a peculiar smile, “ that it would be very wicked and monstrous if I were to sacrifice my father’s interests to your father’s interests ? I should think

not, myself. There are two fathers in the case ; what one loses the other gains."

"I do not understand you," Yolande said.

"Well, this is the point. What deer may be found in the Allt-nam-ba gullies will most likely go in from our forest. Sometimes they cross from Sir John's ; but I fancy our forest contributes the most of them ; they like to nibble a little at the bushes for a change ; and, indeed, in very wild weather they are sometimes driven down from the forest to get shelter among the trees. Oh, don't you know?" he broke in, noticing some expression of her eyes. "There are no trees in a deer-forest—none at all—except perhaps a few stunted birches down in the corries. Well, you see, as the deer go in from our forest into your gullies, it is our interest that they should be driven out again, and it is your interest that they should stay. And I don't think they will stay if there is not a glass of whisky about the place ; that was the hint I meant to give you, Miss Winterbourne."

"But I don't understand yet," said Yolande. "Whisky?"

"All your father's chances at the deer will depend on the goodwill of the shepherds. The fact is we put some sheep on Allt-nam-ba, mostly as a fence to the forest ; there is no pasturage to speak of ; but, of course, the coming and going of the shepherds and the dogs drive the deer back. Now supposing—just listen to me betraying my father's interests and my own—supposing there is an occasional glass of whisky about, and that the shepherds are on very friendly terms with you ; then not only are they the first to know when a good stag has come about, but they might keep themselves and their dogs down in the bothy until your father had gone out with his rifle. Now do you see?"

"Oh yes ; oh yes !" said Yolande, eagerly. "It is very kind of you. But what am I to do? My father would not have whisky in the house—oh, never, never—not for all the deer in the country. Yet it is sad—it is provoking—I should be so proud if he were to get some beautiful fine horns to be hung up in the hall, when we take a house some day. It is very, very, very, provoking."

"There is another way," said he, quietly, "as the cookery book says. You need not have whisky in the house. You

might order a gallon or two in Inverness and give it in charge to Duncan the keeper. He would have it in his bothy, and would know what to do with it."

Out came her note-book in a second: *Two gallons of whisky addressed to Mr. Duncan Macdonald, gamekeeper, Allt-nam-ba, with note explaining.* At the same moment the dragoman entered the room to prepare lunch; and a glance out of the window showed them the other members of the party at the foot of that great blazing mass of ruddy-yellow that rose away into the pale-blue Egyptian sky.

"Mind you, don't say I have had anything to do with it," said he (and he was quite pleased that this little secret existed between them). "My father would think I was mad in giving you these hints. But yet I don't think it is good policy to be so niggardly. If your father kills three or four stags this year, the forest will be none the worse, and Allt-nam-ba will let all the more easily another season. And I hope it is not the last time we shall have you as neighbours."

She did not answer the implied question; for now the other members of the party entered the room, breathless and hot and fatigued, but glad to be able to shut back at last the clamouring horde of Arabs who were still heard protesting and vociferating without.

That same evening they left Cairo by the night train for Asyoot, where the dahabeeah of the Governor of Merhadj was awaiting them; and for their greater convenience they took their dinner with them. That scrambled meal in the railway-carriage was something of an amusement; and in the midst of it all the young Master of Lynn would insist on Yolande's having a little wine. She refused at first, merely as her ordinary habit was; but when he learned that she had never tasted wine at all, of any kind whatever, he begged of her still more urgently to have the smallest possible quantity.

"It will make you sleep, Miss Winterbourne," said he, "and you know how distressing a wakeful night journey is."

"Oh no," she said, with a smile. "Not at all. There is to be moonlight, and why should not one lie awake? My papa wished me not to drink wine, and so I have not; and I have never thought about it. The ladies at the Château scarcely took any; they said it was not any better than water."

"But fancy you never having tasted it at all!" he said, and then he turned to her father. "Mr. Winterbourne, will you give Miss Yolande permission to take a very little wine—to taste it?"

The reply of her father was singular.

"I would sooner see her drink Prussic acid—then the end would be at once," said he.

Now this answer was so abrupt, and apparently so unnecessarily harsh, that the Master of Lynn, not knowing what blunder he had made, immediately strove to change the subject; and the most agreeable thing he could think of, to mention to Yolande's father, was the slaying of stags.

"While you were going up the Great Pyramid this morning, Mr. Winterbourne," said he, "we were talking about what you were likely to do at Allt-nam-ba; and I was telling your daughter I hoped you would get a stag or two."

"Yes?—oh yes," said Mr. Winterbourne, apparently recalling himself from some reverie by an effort of will. "A stag? I hope so. Oh yes, I hope so. We will keep a sharp look-out."

"Miss Winterbourne" said the younger man, with a significant glance at her which seemed to remind her that they had a secret in common, "was surprised to hear that there were no trees in a deer-forest. But her ignorance was very excusable. How could she know? It wasn't half as bad as the talk of those fellows in Parliament and the newspapers, who howl because the deer-forests are not given over to sheep, or to cattle, or turned into small crofts. Goodness gracious, I wonder if any one of them ever saw a deer-forest? Miss Winterbourne, that will be something for you to see—the solitude and desolation of the forest—mile after mile of the same moorland and hill without a sound, or the sight of a living thing——"

"But is not that their complaint—that so much land is taken away, and not for people to live on?" said Yolande, who had stumbled on this subject somewhere in following her father's Parliamentary career.

"Yes," said he, ironically; "I wonder what they'd find there to live on. They'd find granite boulders, and withered moss, and a hard grass that sheep won't touch, and that cattle

won't touch, and that even mountain hares would starve on. The deer is the only living animal that can make anything of it; and even he is fond of getting into the gullies to have a nibble at the birch-trees. I wish those Radical fellows knew something of what they were talking about, before making all that fuss about the Game Laws. The Game Laws won't hurt you, if you choose to keep from thieving."

"But you are a Liberal, are you not?" said Yolande, with wide open eyes. Of course, she concluded that any one claiming the friendship of her father and herself must needs be a Liberal. Travelling in the same party, too: why——

Well, it was fortunate for the Master that he found himself absolved from replying; for Mr. Winterbourne broke in, with a sardonic kind of smile on his face.

"That is a very good remark of yours, Mr. Leslie," said he; "a very good remark indeed. I have something of the same belief myself, though I shock some of my friends by saying so. I am for having pretty stringent laws all round; and the best defence for them is this—that you need not break them unless you choose. It may be morally wrong to hang a man for stealing a sheep; but all you have got to do is not to steal the sheep. Well, if I pay seven hundred and fifty pounds for a shooting, and you come on my land and steal my birds, I don't care what may happen to you. The laws may be a little severe; but your best plan would have been to earn your living in a decent way, instead of becoming an idle, sneaking, lying, and thieving poacher——"

"Oh certainly, certainly," said the younger man, with great warmth.

"That is my belief at all events," said Mr. Winterbourne, with the same curious sort of smile; "and it answers two ends: it enables me to approve my gamekeeper for the time being, when otherwise I might think he was just a little too zealous; and also it serves to make some friends of mine in the House very wild; and you know there is nothing so deplorable as lethargy."

"But you are a Liberal, Mr. Leslie, are you not?" repeated Yolande.

And here again he was saved—by the ready wit of his sister.

"My dearest Yolande, what are you talking about!" she said. "What these two have been saying would make a Liberal or a Radical jump out of his five senses—or is it seven? Is it seven, Jim?"

"I don't know," her husband said, lazily. "Five are quite enough for a Radical."

"I know I used to have a great sympathy with poachers," continued pretty Mrs. Graham. "It always seemed to me romantic—I mean, when you read about the poacher in poems—his love of sport, you know——"

"His love of sport!" her husband growled, contemptuously. "A miserable, sneaking fellow loafing about the public-house all day, and then stealing out at night with his ferrets and his nets to snare rabbits for the market. A love of sport!——"

"Oh, but I can remember," said she, stoutly, "when I was a girl, there were other stories than that. That is the English poacher. I can remember when it was quite well known that the Badenoch young fellows were coming into the forest for a deer; and it was winked at by everybody when they did not come more than twice or thrice in the year. And that was not for the market. Anybody could have a bit of venison who wanted; and I have heard that there was a fine odour of cooking in the shepherds' bothies just about that time."

"That has nothing to do with the Game Laws," her husband said, curtly. "I doubt whether deer are protected by the Game Laws at all. I think it is only a question of trespass. But I quite agree with Mr. Winterbourne: if laws are too severe, your best plan is not to break them."

"Well, I was cured of my sympathy on one occasion," said Mrs. Graham, cheerfully (having warded off danger from her brother). "Do you remember, Jim? You and I were driving down Glenstroy, and we came on some gypsies. They had a tent by the roadside; and you know, dear Yolande, I wasn't an old married woman in those days, and grown suspicious; and I thought it would be nice to stop and speak to the poor people and give them some money to get proper food when they reached a village. Do you know what Jim said?—'Money for food? Most likely they are plucking a brace of my uncle's black game.' Well, they were not. We got down from the trap; and went into the little tent; and they

weren't plucking a brace of black game ; but they were cooking two hen pheasants on a spit ; as comfortable as might be. I suppose a gypsy wouldn't do much good as a deer-stalker, though ?”

And while they thus sat and chatted about the far northern wilds (Yolande was deeply interested ; and the Master of Lynn perceived that ; and he had himself an abundance of experience about deer) the sunset went, and presently, and almost suddenly, they found themselves in the intense blackness of the tropical night. When, from time to time, they looked out of the window, they could see nothing at all of the world around ; though Jupiter and Venus were shining clear and high in the western heavens, and Orion's jewels were paling as they sank ; and away in the south, near the horizon, the solitary Sirius gleamed. But as the night went on (and they were still talking of Scotland) a pale light—a sort of faint yellow smoke—appeared in the south-east ; and then a sharp, keen glint of gold revealed the edge of the moon. The light grew and spread up into the sky ; and now the world around them was no longer an indistinguishable mass of black ; its various features became distinct as the soft radiance became fuller and fuller ; and by and by they could make out the walls of the sleeping villages, with their strange shadows, and the tall palms that threw reflections down on the smooth and ghostly water. Can anything be more solemn than moonlight on a grove of palms—the weird darkness of them, the silence, the consciousness that all around lies the white, still desert ? Yolande's fancies were no longer far away ; this silent, moonlit world out there was a strange thing.

Then, one by one, the occupants of the railway-carriage dropped off to sleep ; and Yolande slept too, turning her face into the window-corner somewhat, and letting her hands sink placidly into her lap. He did not sleep ; how could he ? He had some vague idea that he ought to be guardian over her ; and then—as he timidly regarded the perfect lines of her forehead and chin and throat, and the delicacy of the small ear, and the sweep of the soft lashes—he wondered that this beautiful creature should have been so long in the world and he wasting the years in ignorance ; and then (for with youth there is little diffidence ; it is always “ I have chosen ;

you are mine ; you cannot be any other than mine") he thought of her as the mistress of Lynn Towers. In black velvet, would she not look handsome, seated at the head of the dinner-table ; or in a tall-backed chair by the fireplace, with the red glow from the birch-logs and the peat making glimmerings on her hair ? He thought of her driving down the Glen ; on the steamboat quay ; on board the steamboat ; in the streets of Inverness ; and he knew that nowhere could she have any rival.

And then it occurred to him that what air was made by the motion of the train must be blowing in upon her face, and that the sand-blinds of the windows were not sufficient protection ; and he thought he could rig up something that would more effectually shield her. So, in the silence and the semi-darkness he stealthily got hold of a light shawl of his sister's, and set to work to fasten one end to the top of the carriage-door and the other to the netting for the handbags, in order to form some kind of screen. This manœuvre took some time, for he was anxious not to waken any one ; and, as he was standing up, he had to balance himself carefully, for the railway-carriage jolted considerably. But at last he got it fixed ; and he was just moving the lower corner of the screen, so that it should not be too close to her head, when, by some wild and fearful accident, the back of his hand happened to touch her hair. It was the lightest of touches ; but it was like an electric shock ; he paused, breathless ; he was quite unnerved ; he did not know whether to retreat or wait ; it was as if something had stung him and benumbed his senses. And light as the touch was it awoke her. Her eyes opened ; and there was a sudden fear and bewilderment in them when she saw him standing over her ; but the next second she perceived what he had been doing for her ; and kindness and thanks were instantly his reward.

"Oh, thank you—thank you," she said, with smiling eyes ; and he was glad to get back into his own corner, and to think over this that had happened, and to wonder at the sudden fear that had paralysed him. At all events, he had not offended her.

The dawn arose in the east ; the cold clear blue giving way to a mystic gray ; but still the moon shone palely on the

palms, and on the water, and the silent plains. And still she slept ; and he was wondering whether she was dreaming of the far North, and of the place that she longed to make a home of, if only for the briefest space. And what if this new day—that was spreading up and up, and fighting the pallid moonlight, and bringing with it colour and life to brighten the awakening world—what if this new day were to bring with it a new courage ; and he were to hint to her—or even to tell her plainly—that this pathetic hope of hers was of easy accomplishment ; and that, after their stay at Allt-nam-ba, if it grieved her to think of leaving the place that she had first thought to make a home of, there was another home there that would be proud and glad to welcome her, not for two months or for three months, but for the length of her life ? Why should not Mr. Winterbourne be free to follow out his political career ? He had gathered from Yolande that she considered herself a most unfortunate drag and encumbrance on her father ; was not this a happy solution of all possible difficulties ? In black velvet, more especially, Yolande would look so handsome in the dining-room at Lynn Towers.

CHAPTER XI.

ISOLATION.

AND as for Mr. Winterbourne himself ? Well, he was not blind. He could see as far ahead as any of them. If his imagination was not captured by any picture of Yolande in black velvet, and if he knew nothing about the desirability of buying back Corrievreak, his hope and prayer for the future was clear and definite enough. To secure for Yolande a peaceful, safe, and happy life—that was his one aim and thought ; and already he clearly recognised, and in his own mind strove to make light of in a sadly humorous way, the necessity of a separation between him and her. It was the way of the world—why should he complain ? If she was securely settled in life, that would be enough happiness for him. And this young fellow, who was paying her so much obvious attention, was a nice enough young fellow, as things went ;

of good birth and breeding, well-mannered, good-natured, and otherwise unobjectionable. And Yolande seemed to be on the most friendly terms with him.

But even now it was a strange thing to find himself being ousted, in however slight a degree, from Yolande's companionship. It was his own doing; and he knew it; and he knew that he was acting wisely in preparing himself by small degrees for the inevitable; and yet he had to confess to himself that the operation was not a pleasant one. Then it was a slow process. Yolande herself did not notice how, whether they were in the Cairo bazaars or in the balcony at the hotel, her father managed to hang back a little; and how the Master of Lynn had come quite naturally to take his place; and how it was the latter, and not the former, who knew where her travelling bag was, and called her maid for her, and bought her fruit at the stations. On this very morning, for example, on their arrival at Aysoot, when they had seen their luggage packed on the camels' backs by the tall and swarthy Arabs, and when they set out to walk down to the Nile, over the burning sands, it was, as usual, Mr. Leslie who happened to be her companion. Her father had lingered behind, under pretence of once more counting over the articles of luggage along with Ahmed the dragoman; and when he overtook the other members of the party it was the Grahams that he chose to accompany. Mrs. Graham was complaining of the discomfort of travelling by night, and declaring that she would not undertake such another journey to avoid all the heat that ever was heard of; and her husband was observing, with the candour of husbands, that her hair certainly did look like a hay-rick in a gale of wind.

"There's Archie," she said, glancing at the two figures in front of them, "he's always spick and span. No matter what happens, he always looks as if he'd come out of a band-box."

"And a very proper thing, too," said Mr. Winterbourne. "To be careless about one's appearance is no great compliment to one's companions. Mrs. Graham," he added, in his timid and nervous way, "I wish you would tell me frankly—you see, there is scarcely any one I ask—would you tell me honestly if you think that Yolande dresses fairly well?"

"Oh, I think she dresses charmingly," said pretty Mrs.

Graham, in the most good-natured way. "Quite charmingly. She is so very original."

"But I don't want her to be original," he said, with a slight touch of querulousness. "That is just it. I want her to go to the very best places, and get what is most correct, and not to mind about the cost of it. I don't care about the cost of it; we have no establishment to keep up; no horses or anything of the kind; and why should she be so particular about the cost of this or that? Really, Mrs. Graham, it would be so kind of you to give her a word of advice——"

"Oh, but dear Yolande and I have had long talks about that already, you know, Mr. Winterbourne," said she. "Do you suppose two women could be so much together without? And I know what she thinks. First and foremost, she wears what she thinks will please you; and I think she is rather clever at finding out what you like."

"Oh, but that is absurd," said he, peevishly. "What do I know about it? Sometimes I have made suggestions; but—but I want her to be well dressed——"

"I would not blame her much for being economical," said Mrs. Graham, with a smile. "It is a very useful quality in a girl. She might marry a poor man, you know."

He glanced at her with a sort of fright in his eyes.

"Oh, but she will never marry any one who—whose position would cause her embarrassments of that kind," he said, hastily. "Oh no. I do not value money much; but she must never be subjected to embarrassments. Besides, I can provide against that. That, at least, is one of the troubles of life she will be safe from. I hope there is no fear of that in her mind."

"Oh probably not, doubtless not," Mrs. Graham said, cheerfully; for she was sorry to have caused this alarm by a chance remark. "And you know I promised on board ship to buy a lot of silks and things for Yolande when we are going home again through Cairo——"

"And silver," he suggested. "She ought to have different belts and bracelets and things of that kind. I suppose Cairo might not be the best place for getting some more expensive jewellery, would it, do you think? Yolande ought to have more jewellery. She is a woman now. Her schoolgirl trinkets

were all very well ; but now she is a woman she must have some proper jewellery——”

“ If I were Yolande,” said Mrs. Graham, demurely, “ and if I had a very generous papa, I think I know what I should do.”

“ What, then ? ” said he, with his eyes brightening ; for to give something to Yolande likely to please her was one of the gladnesses of his life—perhaps even the chief.

“ I would take him to a shop in Cairo—Abderahman, was it ?—and I would ask him just to look again at that wonderful piece of Syrian embroidery——”

“ I remember,” said he, quickly. “ I remember quite well. Of course she shall have it ! I had no idea she cared for it.”

“ Do you think any living woman could look at it without coveting it with her whole soul ? But she was not likely to say that to you. It was horribly expensive—I forget how much.”

“ She shall have it,” he said briefly.

“ It would make the loveliest opera-cloak,” she suggested.

“ An opera-cloak ? ” he repeated, with a sudden change of manner.

“ It would be perfectly gorgeous,” she said.

“ Oh, but I don’t think she will want an opera-cloak,” said he, coldly. “ It would be a pity. It would be throwing it away.”

“ Are you never going to take her to the theatre, then ? ” said Mrs. Graham, with a stare.

“ I hope Yolande will not live much in cities,” said he, somewhat hastily, and evidently wishing to get rid of the subject. “ She has lived always in the country—look at the health of her cheeks. I hope she will never live in a city ; she will live a far quieter and happier life in the country ; and she will do very well without theatres or anything of the kind.”

Then he seemed to think he had been unnecessarily harsh in his refusal ; and so he said, in a lighter way—

“ No, no ; I have my own plans, Mrs. Graham. I want to induce a very estimable lady to persuade that girl of mine into buying a lot of things that are necessary for her, now that she is a young woman. And I want a bribe for the purpose ; and I have discovered that she has a fancy for a piece of Syrian

needlework. Very well—now, I am going to have my own way, and there is no use protesting—you are going to take that piece of embroidery home with you; and you will make something of it at Inverstroy; and perhaps Yolande and I will pay you a visit some day—if it is not too far to drive from Allt-nam-ba—and then we shall see how a bit of Cairo looks in Inverness-shire.”

They could not pursue the subject further; for they now found themselves on the landing-stage by the side of the river; and there was a fearful shouting and yelling over the unloading of the luggage from the camels' backs. But from this Babel of confusion there was an easy escape. Among all the trading vessels moored by the river's bank, there was but one dahabeeah (the tourist season being long over); and they made no doubt that this gaily coloured thing—looking like a huge state barge, but with long yards sweeping up to the sky both at the bow and astern—was the vessel which the Governor of Merhadj had sent for them. They eyed it, every feature of it, curiously—the rows of the cabin windows with their sun-blinds of a most vivid green; the vast awning on the upper deck; the enormous yellow dragon at the prow; and everywhere a blaze of gaudy colours, blue and white. And while they were thus examining it, a tall and grave person, in a white turban and garment of sombre black, who proved to be the captain, came ashore; and, after a word or two in Arabic with Ahmed, came up to Colonel Graham and respectfully presented him with a letter.

“Hillo,” said he, “this is from young Ismat. Rather queer English. He is in ‘an abysm of despair.’ Father gone into the interior—important meeting with some Sheiks—despairs he must remain in Merhadj—hopes to see us when we come up—hopes we shall find the dahabeeah comfortable—has heard of Ahmed—very good man—hopes we bring good news from Cairo—if we are at all afraid, his father will give us a guard of soldiers—what the mischief does he mean? Come on, Polly; let's go and take possession.”

And indeed it was with great delight that they got away from the noise and bustle, the heat and dust, of the outer world into the spacious and cool interior of this barge; and great was their curiosity in exploring cabin after cabin, and

finding each one more like a little French boudoir—in a cheapish kind of style—than anything else. There was nothing at all Eastern about the fittings or decoration of this dahabeeah, except a green and scarlet rug here and there ; the saloons and state-rooms were all of white and gold, with flimsy French-looking mirrors, and French-looking little curtains, and aniline-dyed table-covers and sofa-cushions. But everything was very clean and bright and cool ; and the circular open space at the stern was a veritable Belvedere, from which, sitting in the shade, they could gaze abroad on the wide yellow green waters of the Nile, and on the picturesque scenes along the banks ; and when, in due course, breakfast was brought them—an interminable meal, with three or four kinds of wine on the table—they forgot that the *menu* and the dishes were French, when their attendant was an Albanian-looking person in embroidered cap and baggy breeches of yellow silk, and when they heard, outside, the hoarse chorus of a Nubian crew labouring at the long oars of one of the trading boats.

Then they went away to their respective cabins to see about the unpacking of their luggage ; and at the same time the Reis Mustapha and his swarthy crew began to unfurl the vast breadth of sail on the forward yard, for the north wind was now blowing steady and fair. And then, by and by, when the members of the party assembled again—on the upper deck, under the wide awning—they found that they were out in the shallow lake-like waters of the Nile, the mighty sail in front of them bellying out and straining at the sheets, and a rippling sound at the prow making a soft and monotonous music. And there were the well-known and monotonous features of the famous river : the brown mud-walled villages ; the dark green palms with their branches slowly moving in the breeze ; the arid wastes of sand ; the tall jet-black figures of the Arabs marching along with stately stride ; now and again the glimpse of a minaret telling of some town or village farther inland ; a group of fellaheen, driving before them their horses, donkeys, and camels ; a drove of buffalo brought down to water themselves—nothing visible of each of them but a shining back, a snout, and a pair of horns busy with the flies ; goats sheltering themselves

in the shadow of the sandbanks from the heat of the noonday sun ; unknown birds floating afar on the surface of the river or stalking unconcernedly along the yellow shoals ; and over all this abundant and curious life the pale distant heat-obscured turquoise blue of the African sky, so different from the deep and keen and quivering blue of the storm-washed atmospheres of the north.

"Well, now, Miss Yolande," said Colonel Graham, lying back in the cane-bottomed easy-chair, and carefully regarding the ash of his cigar, "what do you think of Ahmed's arrangements? Are they satisfactory? Does the turmoil of Nile travel fatigue you; do the hardships oppress you? Of course, you cannot expect to penetrate the deserts of Africa without suffering privations. I hope the meagre fare will not make a skeleton of you. The rude accommodation of these cabins——"

"Oh, I think everything is delightful," said she, "and this cool wind is delicious."

But then she fixed her eyes on him solemnly.

"I wished to ask a question, however, Colonel Graham. Did you hear a shriek? No? Well, this is the question: I found a cockroach in one of the drawers as big as—as—well, I thought it was an alligator out of the river—you did not hear Jane shriek?—and I would like to know if all the beasts are similar in proportion——"

"My dear child!" broke in Mrs. Graham. "Thank goodness you know nothing about it—you were never in India. Here you haven't to twitch off the bed-clothes before going to bed to make sure that there isn't a snake waiting for you. Why, what is there here? Nothing. The heat is bad; but it is dry: it does not sap the life out of you like the Indian heat. The flies worry; but they are not nearly so bad if you don't lose your temper. The mosquitoes are pretty considerable, I admit; but you have your Levinge——"

"Do you think I was complaining?" exclaimed Yolande. "Complaining?—as we are now!"

"No, it was Jim, I daresay," said the other, most gratuitously. "Men always do complain, because they have so little to complain about. But it would take an A1 complainer to find anything wrong with a day like this, or with such a

pleasant setting-out ; and I do hope, Jim, you will be civil for once, and let that young fellow and his father know how much we are obliged to them for the loan of the boat. They expect it, those Eastern people. They are not all grumpy, like Englishmen and Scotchmen. I do hope you'll be polite to him."

"All right," said her husband, with his lazy good-nature, "I'll Bismillah him within an inch of his life."

So the calm and shining and dream-like day went pleasantly by, the slowly-moving panorama around them constantly offering objects of new interest. In the afternoon they passed some ranges of bare and arid limestone hills ; and on the face of them—now catching a faint pink or lilac glow from the westering sun—they could make out the entrances of ancient tombs, placed high above all possible inundations. It was not far south of this portion of the river that the Reis resolved to come to an anchor ; for the sunset (which was somewhat chromo-lithographic in character, like most of the atmospheric effects in Egypt) was of brief duration ; and the twilight was even briefer ; so that night, with all her stars, was upon them ere they had begun to think of preparing for dinner.

That was a pleasant enough meal, too, in the cheerful little saloon, the spurious colours of which were in a measure subdued by the yellow radiance of the swinging-lamp. The two women had put on their lightest and coolest and brightest costumes ; and now, for the first time, perhaps, they recognised how completely the little group of them was shut off from the world. On board ship they had plenty of neighbours ; in hotels they sat at the *table d'hôte* ; but here they were really a family party ; and Colonel Graham, in addressing Yolande, dropped the "Miss" quite naturally, and it seemed as though these people had known each other all their lives through, and that they had come away for their holiday-trip, and were to be together until they returned again together to their proper home in the Highlands. The Grahams, indeed, talked as if they had already annexed and adopted Yolande.

After dinner they adjourned to the upper deck for the sake of coolness ; and there coffee was brought them ; and the women-folk lay idly in their rocking-chairs and used their fans ; and the men lit their cigars. There was plenty of light ; for two large swinging-lamps had been hung from the iron bars ;

and these threw a reddish-golden glow on the canvas of the awning and on the deck. But one had only to step to the side of the vessel, and look out from this yellow glare, to find all around the darkness and the silence of the desert, and overhead the solemn heavens with their multitude of throbbing stars. The Nile could scarcely be heard as it ran swiftly and noiselessly and unseen beneath.

By and by the Master of Lynn, who had been leaning on the railing, and looking out into the clear, dark night, came back, and said to Yolande—

“Miss Winterbourne, I wish you would come and look at this constellation. I think it is the Southern Cross. Do you know it? I think this must be the Southern Cross.”

She instantly rose and followed him to the side of the deck, where they were at some little distance from the others. They talked about the constellation, but could make nothing of it. Of course, what he had asked her to come there for was to fulfil his resolve of the night before—to hint to her that, if the charm of home had such great attractions for her, there was one home he knew that would be glad to welcome her and cherish her, now and throughout all her life. But some compunction seized him—some sudden qualm of conscience. The doubt occurred to him as to whether it was quite fair. It was like trying to steal away the affections of the girl; and she the only daughter and companion of this solitary man. Ought he not to speak to her father first, and get to know what his plans were, and so be able to approach her in a franker way? Perhaps he might be able to gain Mr. Winterbourne’s approval, and thus be thrice armed?

Yolande’s father, who had regarded these two as they stood there by the rail, looking out into the starlit night, watched them as they came back again; and he looked at the girl with a strange and wistful look. Had she said “Yes” already? Was she going away from him? But there was no sign of any emotion on the fair young face—neither alarm nor concealment, nor maiden hesitation, nor anything of the sort. Quite frankly and naturally she came over to her father’s chair, sat down beside him on the deck, and put her hand on his knee.

“I wish I knew a little more about the stars,” she said.

CHAPTER XII.

A CONSPIRACY.

"I THINK I am doing what is right," the Master of Lynn said to his sister, of whom, in his perplexity, he was driven to take counsel.

They had once more resumed their idle, uneventful, dream-like voyage up the broad river ; and the dahabeeah was large, and had many quiet corners for confidential conversations. Moreover, the monotony of the scene around them left them ample leisure. Their attention was seldom called away by any striking feature or incident ; and never at all by any atmospheric phenomena. They had grown accustomed to the level plains of yellow sand, the distant low hills quivering in the heat, the wide, yellow-green waters ruffled by the northerly breeze, and the palms, and the mud-villages, and the groups of swarthy Arabs or Nubians lazily driving down the sheep and camel and buffalo to the banks of the stream. The pulse of the world beat slowly there.

"Yes, I think you are doing what is right—though not what is usual, perhaps," said his sister, regarding him.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well," she said, with a smile, "no doubt it is quite correct to ask the papa's permission first ; it is quite according to rule and etiquette ; but generally, I should think, some understanding exists——"

"But I am afraid to startle her," he said, quickly. "Besides, there might be some one else ; and I would rather get to know that from her father."

"There is no one else," said pretty Mrs. Graham, sipping her tumbler of cold tea. "What is more, you are acting with greater prudence than I could have given you credit for. But I suppose you don't know ; you don't understand."

"What's the conundrum now?" he asked, bluntly.

"Yolande and I have had some talk together," she said ; and she regarded him with an air of superior sagacity. "I happen to know what she thinks ; and you are acting very prudently in going to her father first. She has been educated in France."

"What do you mean? Why don't you speak out?" he said, irritated by these women's ways of mystery.

"Is there any need? She has been educated in France; and she knows what her duty is. She will marry any one her father approves of. It is for him to arrange it. But there is something further in her case. Yolande is haunted by the fear that she is a burden and drag on her father—that she is taking him away from public life. And I think she is right. Why should he be here just now, for example? It is all very well for Jim and me to take a holiday; but for a member of the House of Commons to be continually leaving England to travel about as he and Yolande do—I don't understand it. It is absurd. Very well; if she once imagines that her father would like to see her married, so that he might attend to his own affairs, the way is clear. And it would be a very good thing. I like the girl. She sticks up for her own; whoever she marries won't have to blow his own trumpet. It would be a very good thing in many ways. I was saying to Jim only the other day that you might buy back Corrievreak."

"Do you think I want to marry her for her money?" said he.

"Well, no. But she has money—or will have it. I dare say, now, if *Shena Vàn*¹——"

"Leave Miss Stewart alone," said he, somewhat hotly.

She laughed.

"Poor girl! It wasn't her fault that she was born in a Scotch manse instead of being the daughter of a member of the House of Commons. But I think *Shena Vàn*, with all her pretty eyes, had a bit of a temper, you know, Archie——"

"Leave her alone, will you," he said, roughly. "You have done her enough mischief."

"I?" said Mrs. Graham, with a stare.

"Well never mind. That is done with. Why don't you have a turn at Miss Winterbourne? You and she appear to be great friends; and women can always say spiteful things about their nearest friends. Haven't you some nice things to say about her too?"

"Wait till she is your wife, Archie, and then I will find out all manner of things against her. You have no idea how sharp a sister-in-law's eyes are."

¹ The proper spelling is Sine Bhan—Fair Janet.

However, this prospect had the immediate effect of removing his wrath; he grew quite friendly and confidential again, and finally announced his resolve to speak to Mr. Winterbourne that very day.

"If the thing is impossible, it will be better to learn it from him. If I were to ask Yolande herself, and if she said no, look how awkward that would be for the rest of this trip. I'd have to go. No; I'll have everything fair and above board; and then no one can complain, whatever happens."

And yet the long, pleasant, idling day had passed before he had screwed up his courage to make the plunge. They had come to an anchor for the night; the sun was sinking far away in the west; along the low-lying eastern hills there was a flush of the pale ethereal pink. The women-folk had disappeared to dress for dinner; Colonel Graham was at the stern of the dahabeeah, fishing; Mr. Winterbourne and he were alone on the upper deck; clearly it was an opportunity not to be missed. Nor, indeed, was there any difficulty, once the subject was mentioned. Yolande's father seemed inclined to meet the younger man half-way, though there was more of resignation than of gladness in the way he spoke.

"Of course, everything depends on herself," he said, at length. "She must be guided by her own wishes——"

"Oh yes, certainly, certainly," said the younger man, with eagerness. "I would not let any consideration interfere with her perfect freedom of choice. That is not to be thought of——"

Mr. Winterbourne was scarcely heeding him; his thoughts were far away; and, when he spoke, it was to interrupt—a rudeness of which he was never consciously guilty.

"Yes, I should like to see Yolande settled in life," he said, absently. "There is no saying what might happen to me. Once or twice I have fancied my heart was affected—but I would not have her imagine such a thing, remember; you must never mention it——"

"Oh, certainly not!"

"Very slight surprises are enough to give me pretty bad palpitation," he continued, "and although it may be nothing serious, still—if Yolande were made quite happy and secure, my mind would be more at rest. I don't say much about

her, though I might. If you win her affection, you are not likely to lose it ; she is staunch. And she has courage. If trouble should come to her or hers, she will not be the one to flinch."

"But why should you anticipate trouble?" said the Master of Lynn, who was very much excited and joyous, and almost eager to go away and ask Yolande at once. "I can see nothing but a pleasant and happy life for her. Of course, sickness may come to any one ; but it is less likely to fall on her than any one I know. Why, to look at her——"

"She ought always to live in the country," said Mr. Winterbourne, quickly, and he glanced at his companion in an inquiring sort of way. "I hope she will never live in a town—the peace and quiet of the country are what I should wish for her always. She does not care for society. Her own small circle is enough for her ; that is where she is best seen ; it is there you get to know her—and—and to love her. Well, perhaps I shouldn't talk about her. She and I have been pretty close companions. It will seem strange to me, at first, that she should belong to some one else ; but—but it is right ; it is in the natural course of things. I shall be content if I know that she is being treated with kindness and affection—and with a little consideration for her youth. Perhaps she will make mistakes, as a young wife ; but she is willing to do her best—and—and she is grateful—for a little consideration——"

It was scarcely an appeal. He was describing Yolande as he had known her. He was thinking of all those bygone years.

But at this moment they were startled by the report of a gun ; and that was followed by another and another.

"What the mischief is that?" called out Colonel Graham, as he hurried forward to the bow ; for, indeed, the air was full of ominous rumours just at that time ; and even a general massacre of the Europeans in Egypt had been talked of as a possibility.

It appeared, however, that this crowd of people who now emerged from a belt of palms, and came down to the river's edge to some boats there, was only a wedding party ; and Ahmed, who had been ashore with the *chef*, explained that these were the friends of the bride, escorting her thus far ;

while the husband to be (the wedding ceremony was to take place in the evening) had sent camels to meet her, which were waiting for her on the other side of the Nile. And of course Mrs. Graham and Yolande were instantly called for, and came up in time to see the little veiled woman, with much conscious dignity, take her place in one of the boats, while her friends proceeded to put into the other boats the bales of carpets and the eight or ten donkeys which formed her marriage portion. Then, away on the other side, they saw two camels make their appearance, the first of them with a big tent on its back, surmounted by three tall hearse-like plumes; and Ahmed, with much queer English, managed to explain that these plumes were the projecting tops of the three palms of which the tent was composed; and that the tent was sent by the bridegroom to receive his bride, while the other camel was to carry her household plenishing.

"It is obvious he hasn't sent a camel to fetch his mother-in-law," said Colonel Graham; but the solemn-faced Ahmed did not understand what was meant, and took refuge in a surreptitious cigarette.

Then they saw the boats being slowly rowed across the great stream; and the donkeys and bales were landed; and the bride disappeared into the tent; and presently the procession was on its way again, until the gathering dusk and the inequalities of the desert hid bride and friends and all from view.

"It is a wide river," said Mr. Winterbourne, absently, looking at the flowing waters, "to lie between the old home and the new, between the old life and the new. But it is the way of the world. She may be quite as happy as a wife as she was as a girl."

"I don't see why she shouldn't be a great deal happier," Mrs. Graham said, cheerfully. "I am. I mean, I should be, if Jim weren't so impatient with Baby. Come away, Yolande dear; I have found a piece of blue ribbon, and I am going to make a snood for your hair."

At dinner it was very clear to Mrs. Graham that her brother had so far met with no hindrance to his suit; for he was unusually vivacious, and most obviously attentive and respectful to Yolande. He was delighted with Egypt, and with this

placid and idle life, and with the general resolve to abstain from sight-seeing ("there are plenty of British Museums everywhere, when you want to be bored," he said somewhat incorrectly); but he was chiefly busy with anticipations of the Highlands, and of the circumstances under which this same little party would reassemble there. He volunteered to go over from Lynn to Allt-nam-ba whenever Mr. Winterbourne wanted a rifle for one of the passes; nay, he said he knew the woods well, and would be glad to serve as an extra beater at any time. And when Mr. Winterbourne and Miss Yolande went to Inverstroy, he meant to beg his brother-in-law for an invitation. Of course they would be going up the hill—that is, Mr. Winterbourne and Colonel Graham—and they would want all the keepers and gillies they could get; and what, in that case, was to become of Miss Yolande's salmon-fishing if he were not there to help? And Yolande regarded him with pleased and grateful eyes. It was so clear that he wished to be kind to her.

After dinner they found that the Arab sailors were having a little concert among themselves, and they stood for a while to listen. The grave-faced performers, with their flowing robes and heavily-turbaned heads, looking picturesque enough in the light of the swinging lamp, were squatted in a circle in the forward part of the dahabeeah, one of them possessed of a tambourine, another strumming on two small tom-toms; and to the time thus beat each singer would contribute a piece of shrill, high, melancholy recitative, while the others accompanied him with a heavy monotonous bass chorus. The Master of Lynn touched his sister on the arm; and she drew back from the little group without her absence being noticed. The two of them passed through the saloon, along the corridor between the cabins, and out into what they called the Belvedere. Here there was nothing visible but the shining starlit heavens and the great broad dusky streams.

"Well?" she said.

"So far it is all right," he said, in a low voice, but with considerable excitement. "Oh, you can't imagine how sensible and reasonable he is about it—and so friendly, too. He told me exactly how he was situated. He would like to see her married and comfortably settled; and he just as good

as intimated that he hoped she would say yes, although, of course, he said he would have everything left to her own wishes. There is another reason, too—which I cannot tell you about ; but I can see plainly that his mind would be much more at ease if this thing were to come off. I am sure of it. Of course, he spoke in rather a sad way ; any one can understand that ; but every one has to consider what will be best in the end. And now, don't you see, Polly—now that I have got on so far, I am beginning to feel a bit shaky. If it had been stopped at the beginning, well and good ; but now I don't want to spoil my chance by making a mistake. And my nerves are not what they ought to be—hanged if they are ; one gets no exercise in this dawdling kind of life ; and you don't feel fit——”

“I know what you're driving at, Archie,” said his sister, with a little laugh. “You want encouragement. Poor thing ! Are you so very nervous ? Is she so terrible ?”

“Oh, but you don't understand,” said he. “You don't see what a chance I have got. Of course a woman does not covet a prize like that ; and you don't understand why I should feel nervous. But—but, you know, if she were suddenly startled, she might say no, plump and decisive. There would be an end. Whereas, if the idea were suggested to her by some one else——”

“That's me,” said his sister, plainly. “You want me to speak to her. But don't you think, my dear Master, that the idea has already occurred to her, and been suggested by yourself ? I should have thought your attentions were obvious enough.”

“You ought to know, Polly,” said he.

“Well, they were obvious enough to me.”

“But she is strange,” said he, doubtfully. “She seems to think it natural that people should be friendly with her ; and with people she knows she has very little reserve. But I have watched her. I have watched her manner with Graham ; she is quite as friendly with him as she is with me. Of the two, I would say she was more friendly with him ; she talks to him as if she had known him all her life.”

“My dear Master, that is her cunning,” said his sister, coolly. “They're all like that. They pretend to prefer

married men ; but they are watching the unmarried ones all the same. Wait till you speak."

He was silent for a second or two ; and, fortunately, the Arabic improvisation going on forward seemed interminable. He passed the fingers of one hand over the open palm of the other ; and regarded them pensively.

"If the biggest stag in Glendyerg was within eighty yards of me just now, I'd back its life against my rifle. I don't know what to do, Polly."

"There is only the one thing to do," said his practical sister.

"I am afraid of that plump and final no. I can't face it. Why——"

"And you want me to go and make her a proposal of marriage on your account ? I wonder what she would think of you !" said pretty Mrs. Graham, scornfully.

"I don't want anything of the kind," said he. "You don't understand. Where are your brains, Polly ?—they're generally sharp enough. I want you to make her familiar with the idea. I don't want to have her startled and frightened. Don't you see, there are a whole lot of things that a third person could talk about. You could tell her, for example, that travelling by ourselves like this shows you what people are. You see what they are, and know them. It isn't the chance acquaintanceship of ball-rooms and drawing-rooms. And she doesn't look on us as acquaintances at all ; we are all old friends now—and rightly, too. There are whole heaps of things, like that, don't you see, Polly, that you might say to her, so that she wouldn't be frightened and startled——"

"And what am I to have for my share in this conspiracy ?"

"Why, the prettiest sister-in-law you could wish for !" he said. "Oh, I know you. You can say sharp things ; but I can see you are very fond of her ; and I know you would be very proud of her if you were to take her to the Northern Meeting at Inverness. What's more—I'd back you two, for good looks, against any two women at the Ball ; and they get up a finer show there than anywhere else I know. She would just suit you, Polly—dark and fair together, of course ; and I know she thinks you dress awfully well ; and she would take your advice."

This final touch proved effectual ; even the shrewd young married woman succumbed.

"Well, I will try to find out what she thinks about it," she said. "Of course, it is on the distinct understanding that her father approves?"

"Oh, most decidedly. He told me so in the plainest terms."

"For that is the short and the long of the whole matter. Very well, I will speak to her. I will do my best for you, Archie, you may depend. For sooner or later you would be making a fool of yourself with some one ; and this girl is really very nice and ladylike ; and I don't think you are likely to do better, in other respects. I suppose they have gone up above for coffee ; shall we go?"

That same night Mrs. Graham announced the news to her husband in the privacy of their cabin.

"I think it is all plain sailing now with Archie," she said. "He has spoken to Mr. Winterbourne about Yolande, and Mr. Winterbourne has given his consent."

"The deuce he has!"

"Why shouldn't he?" she retorted, with some sharpness.

"Oh, I daresay it's all right," rejoined the lazy soldier, as he began to arrange the occult mechanism of his Levinge. "Rather a brief acquaintance, aint it?"

"Why, certainly not. Archie was talking about that very thing. This constant companionship is worth years of acquaintanceship, and I don't see why they should not thoroughly understand and appreciate each other by now. Archie does, any way. And each has just what the other wants ; she has money, and he will succeed to the title. I think it will be a very good match."

"Oh, I think so too," her husband said, good-naturedly. "She seems fond of him. And if he treated her with a little less courtesy, I daresay she would treat him with a little more frankness ; she is a humorous young party at times. But that will all come right. I don't quite see why it shouldn't be quite plain sailing, as you say. His Lordship will kick up dust and thunder about Winterbourne's politics ; but the buying back of Corrievreak will bring him round. Good-night."

Suddenly she uttered a shrill scream.

"Oh, Jim—a cockroach!——"

"Very well; it isn't a kangaroo, is it?" said he, sulkily.
"Besides my revolver isn't loaded."

"Such a beast!—such a monster!——"

"Why don't you get into your hammock, then, instead of sitting there?"

"I'm going directly," she said; for indeed her dread of these huge insects was such that they had had to rig up a hammock for her in her cabin. "But, Jim, I want to ask you about something that has been puzzling me a good deal. Didn't you say that the Winterbournes were a comparatively old family, up in the north of England there?"

"I believe so—I've heard so," her husband said, sleepily.

"Then why should Mr. Winterbourne want me to buy jewellery for Yolande?"

"Because she hasn't got any; or hasn't got enough, I suppose. Don't see it's any of my business."

"But where is the family jewellery?"

"How can I tell? He may be a younger son—rather think he is. What does it matter to you? You'll like the spending of the money well enough."

"But how should the girl come to have no jewellery at all? Where is her mother's? and her mother's mother's?"

"Oh, how can I tell! All I know is, she'll soon have plenty if Winterbourne allows you to go careering up and down Bond Street."

"Well, it is strange, you know," said pretty Mrs. Graham, as she placidly examined the fastenings of her hammock. "I don't understand it; but it is one of those things that one can't well ask about. I never knew a girl, at her age, in her position in life, who hadn't plenty of jewellery—family rings and things of that sort. What an odd thing it would be if an engagement-ring were to be the first; and in that case I do hope Archie will buy a nice one when he is about it! But it is very strange, you know, Jim."

CHAPTER XIII.

INTERVENTION.

MRS. GRAHAM saw clearly before her the difficulties and danger of the task she had undertaken ; and she approached it with much circumspection and caution. Time and an abundance of opportunities were on her side, however. Moreover, she and Yolande were like sisters now ; and when the men-folk were smoking together in some other part of the dahabeeah, and talking about public affairs or their chances of having a little shooting in the neighbourhood of Merhadj, these two were most likely seated in the cool shade of the Belvedere, having a quiet and confidential chat all to themselves, the while the slow-moving panorama of the Nile stole stealthily by.

And gradually Mrs. Graham got Yolande to think a good deal about the future, which, ordinarily, the girl was loth to do. She had an admirable capacity for enjoying the present moment, so long as the weather was fine, and her father not a long way off. She had never experienced any trouble ; and why should she look forward to any ? She was in perfect health, and consequently her brain was free from morbid apprehensions. Sometimes, when Mrs. Graham was talking with the sadness begotten of worldly wisdom, the younger woman would laugh lightly and ask what there was on earth to depress her—except, perhaps, the absence of dear Baby. In short, Yolande could not be made anxious about herself. She was content to take the present as it was, and the future as it might come. She was far more interested in watching the operations of this or that African kingfisher, when the big black and gray bird, after fluttering in the air for a while in the manner of a hawk, would swoop down and dive into the river, emerging with a small silver fish in its beak.

But if she could not easily be made anxious about herself, she very easily indeed could be made anxious about her father ; and Mrs. Graham quickly discovered that anything suggested about him was instantly sufficient to arouse her interest and concern. She played upon that pipe skilfully, and yet with not the faintest notion that her siren music was anything but

of the simplest and honestest kind. Was it not for the welfare and happiness of every one concerned? Even Jim, with his faculty for looking at the sardonic side of things, had not a word to say against it. It would be a very good arrangement, that oracle had declared.

"Do you know, dear," said she one morning to Yolande, "what Jim has just been saying?—that he would not be surprised if, sooner or later, your father were offered some place in the Government."

Yolande opened her eyes wide with surprise. But then she laughed, and shook her head.

"Oh no. It is impossible. He is not good friends with the Government. He has too many opinions to himself."

"I don't know," said pretty Mrs. Graham, looking at one of the little French mirrors, and smoothing her curls. "I don't know. You should hear Jim, any way. Of course, I don't mean a post with a seat in the Cabinet; but office of some kind—an Under-Secretaryship or something of that sort. Jim says he heard just before he left town that the Government were going to try to conciliate the Radicals, and that some member below the gangway would most likely be taken in. It would please some of the northern towns; and Slagpool is an important place."

"Oh, do you think it is possible?" cried the girl, with a new light in her eyes. "My papa in the Ministry—and always in town?—"

"That's just it, Yolande dear," said Mrs. Graham. "If your papa were a member of the Government, in whatever place, he could not go gallivanting about like this——"

"Oh, of course not, certainly not," the girl said, eagerly. "He would live in London. He would have a house—a proper home. Do you think it is likely? I never heard of it before. But why should it not be—why should it not be, dear Mrs. Graham? There are very few members in the House of Commons—why, scarcely any at all—who are returned by such a number of persons. Look at the majority he always has: does it not say that those people respect him, and believe he is working for the good of the country? Very well; why should it not be?"

"I quite agree with you; and Jim says it is not at all

unlikely. But you were talking about a house, Yolande dear : well, it would scarcely be worth your papa's while to take a house merely for you ; though it is certainly of importance for a member of the Government to have a town house, and entertain, and so forth. You could scarcely manage that, you know, my dear ; you are rather young ; but if your papa were to marry again ?”

“ Yes ?” said Yolande, without betraying any dismay.

“ In that case I have been wondering what would become of you,” said the other, with her eyes cast down.

“ Oh, that is all right,” said the girl, cheerfully. “ That is quite right. Madame has directed me to that once or twice—often ; but not always with good sense, I consider. For it cannot always happen that step-mother and step-daughter do not get on well—if there is one who is very anxious to please. And if my papa were to marry again, it is not that I should have less of his society ; I should have more ; if there was a home, and I allowed to remain, I should have more ; and why should I have anything but kindness for his wife, who gives me a home ? Oh, I assure you, it is not I who would make any quarrel.”

“ Oh no ; I daresay not,—I daresay not, Yolande dear,” said the other, with a gracious smile. “ You are not terribly quarrelsome. But it seldom answers. You would find yourself in the way. Sooner or later, you would find yourself in the way.”

“ Then I would go.”

“ Where ?”

The girl made a little gesture by turning out the palms of her hands ever so slightly.

“ I will tell you, my dear child, of one place where you could go. If you came to us at Inverstroy—now, or then, or at any time—there is a home there waiting for you ; and Jim and I would just make a sister of you.”

She spoke with feeling, and, indeed, with honesty ; for she was quite ready to have welcomed Yolande to their northern home, wholly apart from the projects of the Master of Lynn. And Yolande for a second put her hand on her friend's hand.

“ I know that,” said she, “ and it is very kind of you to think of it ; and I believe it true—so much that, if there was

any need, I would accept it at once. And it is a very nice thing to think of—that there are friends who would take you into their own home, if there were need. Oh, I assure you, it is pleasant to think of, even when there is no need at all.”

“Will you come and try it? Will you come and see how you like it,” said pretty Mrs. Graham, with a courageous cheerfulness. “Why not? Your papa wants to be back in time for the Budget, or even before that. They say that it will be a late Session—that if they get away for the Twelfth they will be lucky. Now, you know, dear Yolande, between ourselves, your father’s constituents are very forbearing. It is all very well for us to make a joke of it here; but really—really—really——”

“I understand you very well,” said Yolande, quickly; “and you think he should remain in London till the Twelfth, and always be at the House? Yes, yes; that is what I think too. Do you imagine it is I who take him away on voyage after voyage? No! For me, I would rather have him always at the House. I would rather read his speeches in the newspaper than see any more cities, and cities, and cities.”

“Very well; but what are you going to do, Yolande, dear, between the time of our getting back and the Twelfth?”

“Oh,” said Yolande, with her face brightening, “that will be a busy time—no more of going away—and I shall be all the time in the hotel in Albemarle Street—and papa and I dining together every night, and having a chat before he goes to the House.”

“I am sure you are mistaken there,” said Mrs. Graham, promptly. “Your father won’t let you stay all that time in town. He hates the very name of town. He is too fond of you, too careful of you, Yolande, dear, and too proud of the roses in your cheeks, to let you shut yourself up in a town hotel.”

“But look at me!” the girl said, indignantly. “Do I look unwell? Am I sick looking? Why should not I live in a town hotel as well as others? Are all unwell who live in London? No; it is folly to say that. And if anything were likely to make me unwell, it is not living in London; but it is the fretting, when I am away from London, that I can be of no use to my papa, and that he is living alone there.

Think of his living alone in the hotel, and dining alone there—worse than that still, dining at the House of Commons. Why, it was only last night Colonel Graham and he were speaking of the bad dinners there—the heat and the crush and the badly-cooked joints—yes, and I sitting there, and saying to myself, ‘Very well, and what is the use of having a daughter if she cannot get for you a pretty dinner, with flowers on the table?’”

“I understand you so well; when you speak, it is like myself thinking,” said Mrs. Graham, in her kindly way (and not at all imagining that she was anything of a hypocrite, or talking for a purpose); “but you may put it out of your head. Your father won’t let you stay in town. I know that.”

“Then I suppose it will be Oatlands Park,” said Yolande, with a bit of a sigh.

“No. Why should it?” said her friend, briskly. “Come to Inverstroy. Go back with us. Then we will see about the cook and the housemaid in Inverness; and Archie will get the dog-cart and horses for you; and we might even go down to Allt-nam-ba, and see that the keeper has kept on fires during the winter, and that the lodge is all right. And then we will all go on to Inverstroy—Archie as well; and he will take you out salmon-fishing, for I shall have my own house to attend to for a while; but we will make you just one of the family, and you will amuse yourself just as you think best; and if we don’t pet you, and make you comfortable, and as happy as ever you were in your life, then my name isn’t Mary Graham. You will just see what a Highland welcome we will give you!”

“I know—I know,” said the girl. “How can I thank you for such kindness? But then to think of my papa being all that time left by himself in London——”

“My dear Yolande, I must speak frankly to you, even if you fancy it cruel. Don’t you imagine your father would stand a little better with his constituents, and consequently be more at ease in his own mind, if he were left by himself a little more than at present? Don’t you think it might be prudent? Don’t you think it would be better for every one if he were left a little freer?”

“Yes, yes—it is so—I can see it——”

"And if you were with us, he could give his whole time and attention to Parliament."

"Yes, yes—though I had other wishes as well," the girl said, with her lips becoming a little tremulous.

"It is a very awkward situation," said Mrs. Graham, with abundant cheerfulness; "but I see the natural way out of it. Perhaps you don't, dear Yolande; but I do. I know what will happen. You will have a house and home of your own; and your father will be very glad to see you happy and settled; and he will give proper attention to Parliament while Parliament is sitting; but when Parliament is not sitting then he will come to you for relaxation and amusement, and you must have a salmon-rod ready for him in the spring, and in the autumn nice luncheons to be sent up the hill, where he will be with the others. Now isn't that something to look forward to?"

"Yes—but—a house of my own?" the girl said, bewildered.

"Of course, when you marry, my dear. That is the obvious solution of the whole difficulty: it will put every one in a proper position."

She said neither yea nor nay; there was no affectation of maiden coyness—no protest of any kind. But her eyes were distant and thoughtful; not sad exactly, but seemingly filled with memories—probably memories of her own futile schemes and hopes.

That afternoon they came in sight of some walls and a minaret or two, half hidden by groves of palms lying along the high banks of the river; and these they were told belonged to Merhadj; but the Reis had had orders to moor the dahabeeah by the shore at some short distance from the town, so that the English party should not be quartered among the confusion and squalor farther along. The consequence of this was that very soon they found themselves the practical owners of a portion of Africa which seemed to be uninhabited; for when the whole party got ashore (with much excitement and eager interest), and waded across the thick sand, and then entered a far-stretching wood of acacia-trees, they could find no trace of human occupation; the only living things being an abundance of hoopoes—the beautiful red-headed and crested birds were so tame that one could have flung one's cap at them—

and wood-pigeons, the latter of a brilliant blue and gray and white. But by and by, as they wandered along—highly pleased to be on shore again, and grateful for the shelter of the trees—they met a slow procession of Arabs, with donkeys and camels, wending their way through the dry rushes and hot sand; and as the animals were heavily laden, they made no doubt that the natives were carrying in farm produce to sell at Merhadj. Then, when they returned to the dahabeeah, they found a note from Ismat Effendi, written in excellent English, saying that his father had just returned from the interior, and that they both would do themselves the honour of paying a visit the following morning.

But what to do till dinner-time—now that the dahabeeah was no longer moving past the familiar features of the Nile? Ahmed came to the rescue. The *chef* was anxious to have some pigeons: would the gentlemen go ashore and shoot some for him? The gentlemen flatly refused to go and kill those half-tame creatures; but they discovered that Ahmed could shoot a little; so they lent him a gun, and offered to beat the wood for him. It was an occupation, at least. And so the two women were left by themselves again, with nothing before them but the choosing of a costume for dinner, and the donning of the same.

It was an opportunity not to be missed, and yet Mrs. Graham was terribly nervous. She had an uncomfortable suspicion all day that she had not been quite ingenuous in her conversation of the morning; and she was anxious to confess, and clear her mind, and yet afraid of the effects of her confession. But Yolande had spoken so reasonably and sensibly; she seemed to recognise the situation; why should she be startled?

For good or ill, she determined to plunge *in medias res*; and she adopted a gay air, though her fingers were rather shaky. She put her arm within Yolande's arm. They were slowly walking up and down the upper deck, under the awning. They could just see the gentlemen of the party, along with Ahmed, disappearing into the grove of dark green acacias.

"Yolande, I am a wicked woman," she said, suddenly. "Hear my confession. I was not quite frank with you this

morning ; and I can't rest till I have told you. The fact is, my dear child, when I spoke to you about the possibility of your marrying, I knew of the wishes of one or two others ; and I ought to have told you. And now I wish to confess everything ; and you will forgive me if I say anything to offend or alarm you——"

"About my marrying?" said the girl, looking rather frightened. "Oh no ; I do not wish to know. I do not wish to know of anything that any one has said to you."

"Then you have guessed?"

The mere question was an intimation. The girl's face flushed, and she said, with an eager haste, and in obvious trouble—

"Why should we speak of any such thing? Dear Mrs. Graham, why should I be afraid of the future? No ; I am not afraid."

"But there are others to be considered—one, at least, whose hopes have been clear enough to the rest of us for some time back. Dearest Yolande, am I speaking too much now?"

She stood still, and took both the girl's hands in hers.

"Am I telling you too much? Or am I telling you what you have guessed already? I hope I haven't spoken too soon!—if I have done anything indiscreet, don't blame *him* ! I could not talk to you just like sister to sister, and have this knowledge in the background, and be hiding it like a secret from you."

Yolande drew her hands away ; she seemed scarcely able to find utterance.

"Oh no, Mrs. Graham—it is a mistake—it is all a mistake—you don't mean what you say——"

"But indeed I do!" the other said, eagerly. "Dearest Yolande, how can I help wishing to have you for a sister? But if I have revealed the secret too soon, why you must forget it altogether, and let Archie speak for himself. But you know I do wish it. I can't help telling you. I have been thinking of what we might be to each other up there in the Highlands ; for I never had a sister, and my mother died when I was quite young, like yours, dear Yolande. You can't tell how pleased I was when Archie began to—to show

you attention ; and I made sure you must have seen how anxious he was to please you——”

She paused for a second here ; but there was no answer ; the girl was too bewildered.

“Why, Jim would be like a big brother to you—you can’t tell how fond he is of you ; and your father approving, too——”

The girl started, as if she had been struck, and her face became quite white.

“Did you say—that my father wished it?” she said, slowly.

“Oh yes—oh yes !” Mrs. Graham said. “What more natural? What should he wish for more than to see you happily married? I wouldn’t say that he would be more free to attend to public affairs—I wouldn’t say that was his reason, though it might be one of several reasons ; but I can very well understand his being pleased at the notion of seeing you married and comfortably settled among people who would make much of you—as I really and truly think we should. Now, dear Yolande, don’t say anything in haste. I am not asking you on behalf of Archie—I am telling you a secret to clear my own mind. Ah, and if you only knew how glad we should be to have you among us !”

The girl’s eyes had slowly filled with tears ; but she would not own it. She had courage. She looked her companion fair in the face, as if to say, “Do you think I am crying. I am not.” But when she smiled, it was a very strange sort of smile—and very near crying.

“Then if it is a secret, let it remain a secret, dear Mrs. Graham,” said she, with a sort of cheerfulness. “Perhaps it will always remain one, and no harm done. I did not know that my papa wished that ; I did not suspect it. No ; how could I? When we have talked of the years to come, that was not the arrangement that seemed best.”

She paused for a while.

“Now I remember what you were saying in the morning. And you knew then, also, that my papa wished it?”

“Oh yes, certainly—not that he has spoken directly to me——”

But Yolande was scarcely listening. Rapid pictures were passing before her—pictures that had been suggested by Mrs.

Graham herself. And Yolande's father, not her future husband, was the central figure of them.

Then she seemed to throw aside these speculations with an effort of will.

"Come," she said, more cheerfully, "is it not time to dress? We will put away that secret—it is just as if you had never spoken—it is all away in the air—vanished. And you must not tell your brother that you have been talking to me; for you know, dear Mrs. Graham, he has been very kind to me, and I would not give him pain—oh, not for anything——"

"My dear Yolande, if he thought there was a chance of your saying yes, he would be out of his senses with joy!" exclaimed the other.

"Oh, but that is not to be thought of," said the girl, with quite a practical air. "It is not to be thought of at all as yet. My papa has not said anything to me. And a little talking between us two—what is that? Nothing—air—it goes away; why should we remember it?"

Mrs. Graham could not understand this attitude at all. Yolande had said neither yes nor no, she seemed neither elated nor depressed; and she certainly had not—as most young ladies are supposed to do, when they have decided upon a refusal—expressed any compassion for the unfortunate suitor. Moreover, at dinner, Mrs. Graham observed that more than once Yolande regarded the young Master of Lynn with a very attentive scrutiny. It was not a conscious, furtive scrutiny; it was calm and unabashed. And Mrs. Graham also noticed that when her brother looked up to address Yolande, and met her eyes, those eyes were not hastily withdrawn in maiden confusion, but rather answered his look with a pleased friendliness. She was certainly studying him, the sister thought.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SETTLEMENT.

NEXT morning there was much hurrying to and fro on board the dahabeeah, in anticipation of the visit of the Governor; so that Mrs. Graham had no chance of having an extended talk

with her brother. Nevertheless she managed to convey to him a few covert words of information and counsel.

"Archie," said she, "I have spoken to Yolande—I have hinted something to her."

"No!" he said, looking rather frightened.

"Oh, you need not be much alarmed," she said, with a significant smile. "Rather the other way. She seems quite to know how you have wished to be kind and attentive to her—quite sensible of it, in fact; and when I hinted something——"

"She did not say 'no' outright?" he interrupted, eagerly; and there was a flush of gladness on his face.

His sister glanced around.

"I thought there could be no harm if I told her that Jim and I would like to have her for a sister," she answered demurely.

"And she did not say 'no' outright?" he repeated.

"Well," Mrs. Graham said, after a second, "I am not going to tell you anything more. It would not be fair. It is your business, not mine. I'm out of it now. I have intermeddled quite enough. But I don't think she hates you. And she seems rather pleased to think of living in the Highlands, with her father having plenty of amusement there, you know; and perhaps she might be brought to consider a permanent arrangement of that kind not so undesirable; and—and, well, you'd better see for yourself. As I say, Jim and I will be very glad to have her for a sister; and I can't say more, can I?"

She could not say more then, at all events; for at this moment Colonel Graham appeared on the upper deck with the intelligence that the Governor's barge was just then coming down the river. Mr. Winterbourne and Yolande were instantly summoned from below; some further disposition of chairs and divans was made; some boxes of cigarettes were sent for; and presently the sound of oars alongside announced the arrival of the chief notables of Merhadj.

The Master of Lynn saw and heard little of what followed; he was far too busy with the glad and bewildering prospect that his sister's obscure hints had placed before him. And again and again he glanced at Yolande timidly, and yet with

an increasing wonder. He began to ask himself whether it was really true that his sister had spoken to her. The girl betrayed no consciousness, no embarrassment; she had greeted him on that morning just as on other mornings; at this moment she was regarding the arrival of those grave officials with an interest which seemed quite oblivious of his presence. As for him, he looked on impatiently. He wished it was all over. He wished to have some private speech with her; to have some inquiry of her eyes—surely her eyes would make some tell-tale confession?—and in a vague kind of way he grew to think that the Governor's son, Ismat Effendi, who was acting as interpreter, and who spoke English excellently, addressed a little too much of the conversation to the two ladies. Moreover, it was all very well for him, on coming on board, to shake hands with Mrs. Graham, for he had known her in India; but why with Yolande?

The Governor—a corpulent and sallow-faced old gentleman who looked like a huge frog—and his companions sat in solemn state; while young Ismat, with much grace of manner and remarkably eloquent eyes, hoped that the visitors were comfortable on board the dahabeeah, and so forth. He was a well-dressed young gentleman; his black frock-coat, white waistcoat, and red tarboosh, were all of the newest and smartest; and his singularly small feet were encased in boots of brilliant polish. The Master of Lynn considered him a coxcomb, and also a Frenchified semi-theatrical coxcomb. But the women-folk liked his pleasant manners and his speaking eyes; and when he said that he had never been to England, but intended to go the next year, Mrs. Graham made him definitely promise that he would pay them a visit at Inverstry.

"And Miss Winterbourne," said the young gentleman with the swarthy face and the brilliant white teeth, "does she live in Scotland also?"

"Well, no," said Mrs. Graham, placidly; "but I hope you will find her there when you come. We want her to go back with us when we go back; and if she likes her first visit perhaps she will come again. I hope you will find her with us."

"And I also, madam, hope to have the felicity of the visit that you propose," said he, "if politics will permit me."

He directed an inquiring and rather curious glance at Colonel Graham.

"You did not hear anything very remarkable in Cairo, sir?"

"Well, nothing remarkable," said the stout soldier. "Lots of rumours. Always plenty of that in politics. Mostly lies. At the Consulate they thought we were safe enough."

The young man turned to his father, who was silently and solemnly sipping his coffee, apparently quite uninterested in what was going on, and spoke in Arabic to him for a second or two. The old gentleman appeared to grunt assent.

"My father says he will have much delight in sending two or three soldiers to accompany your party if you are making excursions into the interior. There is no danger, except that some bad men will try to rob, when they can. Or if you will permit me, if you will have the grace to permit me, I will accompany you myself."

"But to take up so much of your time——" said pretty Mrs. Graham, with one of her most pleasant smiles.

He waved his hand in a deprecatory fashion.

"It will be too charming for me. Perhaps your dragoman does not know the district as well as I. Do you permit me? Shall I come to-morrow, with everything prepared?"

"Look here, Mr. Ismat," said Colonel Graham; "you'd better come along and dine with us this evening; then we can talk it over. In the meantime we can't keep your father and the other gentlemen waiting while we discuss our rambles. Will you please tell his Excellency once more how much obliged we are, and honoured by his visit; and that we will do ourselves the pleasure of coming to see him at Merhadj to-morrow, if that will suit his Excellency's convenience?"

This was the final arrangement—that young Ismat Effendi was to come along to dinner in the evening; a prospect which seemed to please him highly. Very soon after the grave company was seated in the stern of the barge, and the big oars were once more at work. The dahabeeah returned to its normal state of silence; the little party of Europeans were again left to their own society; and the Master of Lynn, a little anxious and excited, and almost fearing to meet Yolande's eyes, and yet drawn towards her neighbourhood by a secret spell, declined to go ashore with the other two gentlemen, and

remained with his sister and Yolande in the Belvedere, in the cool shade of the canvas awning.

No ; she betrayed not the slightest embarrassment at his sitting thus quite near her ; it was he who was nervous, and awkward in his speech. She was engaged in some delicate needlework ; from time to time she spread it out on her lap to regard it ; and all the time she was chatting freely with Mrs. Graham about the recent visitors and their grave demeanour, their almost European costume, their wonderfully small feet, and so forth.

"Why do you not go ashore?" she said, turning with frank eyes to the Master of Lynn. "It is so interesting to see the strange birds, the strange plants."

"It is cooler on the river," said he.

He was wondering whether his sister would get up and go away and leave them together ; and he was half afraid she would and half afraid she would not. But at all events he was now resolved that on the first opportunity he would speak to Yolande himself. He would not trust to any go-between. Was it not enough that she had had some intimation made to her of his wishes and hopes, and yet showed no signs of fear at his approach?

The mid-day went by, and he found no chance of addressing her. His sister and she sat together, and sewed and chatted, or stopped to watch some passing boat and listen to the boatmen singing a long and melancholy chorus to the clanking of the oars. At lunch-time Mr. Winterbourne and Colonel Graham turned up. Then in the afternoon the whole of them got into a boat, and were rowed away to a long and flat and sandy island on the other side of the Nile, which they explored in a leisurely way. And then back again to the dahabeeah for a draught of cold tea in the welcome shade of the awning.

It was not until near the end of the day that the long-looked-for opportunity arrived ; indeed, nearly every one had gone below to get ready for dinner ; but Yolande had lingered above to watch the coming over of the twilight. It was a strange enough sight in its way. For after the yellow colour had died out of the bank of bearded corn above the river's edge, and while the strip of acacia-trees over that again had grown solemn and dark against the clear, pallid, blue-gray sky of the south,

far away in the north-western heavens there still lingered a glow of warmer light, and a few clouds high up had caught a saffron tinge from the sinking sun. It seemed as if they here were shut in with the dark, while far away in the north,—over the Surrey lanes, and up among the Westmoreland waters, and out amid the distant Hebridean isles—the summer evening was still fair and shining. It led one to dream of home. The imagination took wings. It was pleasant to think of those beautiful and glowing scenes, here where the gloom of the silent desert was gathering all around.

She was standing by the rail of the deck ; and, when the others had gone, he quietly went over to her, and began talking to her—about the Highlands mostly, and of the long, clear twilights there, and how he hoped she would accept his sister's invitation to go back home with them when they returned to England. And when she said something very pretty about the kindness of all of them to her, he spoke a little more warmly, and asked if there was any wonder ? People got to know one another intimately through a constant companionship like this, and got to know and admire and love beautiful qualities of disposition and mind. And then he told her it would not be honest if he did not confess to her that he was aware that his sister had spoken to her—it was best to be frank ; and he knew she was so kind she would not be angry if there had been any indiscretion ; and he begged for her forgiveness if she had been in any way offended. He spoke in a very frank and manly way ; and she let him speak, for she was quite incapable of saying anything ; her fingers were working nervously with a small pocket-book she held, and she had turned partly away, dreading to lift her eyes, and yet unable to go until she had answered him somehow. Then she managed to say, rather hurriedly and breathlessly—

“ Oh no, I am not offended. Why ? It is—a great honour—I—I knew it was your sister's kindness and friendship that made her speak to me—please let me go away now——”

He had put his hand on her arm, unwittingly.

“ But may I hope, Yolande ? May I hope ?” he said, and he stooped down to listen for the faintest word. “ I don't want you to pledge yourself altogether now. Give me time. May I try to win you ? Do you think some time—some time

of your own choosing—as far ahead as you may wish—you will consent? May I hope for it? May I look forward to it—some day?”

“Oh, but I cannot tell you—I cannot tell you now,” she said, in the same breathless way. “I am sorry if I have given any pain—any anxiety—but—some other time I will try to talk to you—or my papa will tell you—but not now—you have always been so kind to me that I ask it from you——”

She stole away in the gathering darkness, her head bent down: she had not once turned her eyes to his. And he remained there for a time, scarcely knowing what he had said or what she had answered; but vaguely and happily conscious that she had not, at all events, refused him. Was it not much? He was harassed by all kinds of doubts, surmises, hesitations; but surely prevailing over these was a buoyant hope, a touch of triumph even? He would fain have gone away for a long stroll in the dusk, to have reasoned out his hopes and guesses with himself; but here was dinner-time approaching, and young Ismat was coming; and he—that is, the Master of Lynn—began to have the consciousness that Yolande in a measure belonged to him, and that he must be there. He went down the steps with a light and a proud heart. Yolande was his, he almost felt assured. How should she regard him, when next they met?

And indeed at dinner there was no longer any of that happy serenity of manner on her part that had so puzzled him before. Her self-consciousness and embarrassment were so great as to be almost painful to witness; she never lifted her eyes; she ate and drank next to nothing; when she pretended to be listening to Ismat Effendi's descriptions of the troubles in the Soudan, any one who knew must have seen that she was a quite perfunctory listener, and probably understood but little of what was being said. But then no one knew that he had spoken but himself; and he strove to convince her that he was not regarding her by entering eagerly into this conversation about the false prophet; and though now and again her trouble and confusion perplexed him—along with the recollection that she had been so anxious to say nothing definite—still, on the whole, triumph and rejoicing were in his heart. And how beautiful she looked, even with the pensive face cast down!

No wonder young Ismat had admired her that morning : the very Englishness of her appearance must have struck him—the tall stature, the fine complexion, the ruddy-golden hair, and the clear, proud, calm, self-confident look of the maidenly eyes. This was a bride fit for a home-coming at Lynn Towers !

But, alas ! Yolande's self-confidence seemed to have strangely forsaken her that evening. When they were all up on deck, taking their coffee in the red glow shed by the lanterns, she got hold of her father, and drew him aside into the darkness.

"What is it, Yolande?" said he, in surprise.

She took hold of his hand ; both hers were trembling.

"I have something to tell you, papa—something serious."

Then he knew, and for a moment his heart sank ; but he maintained a gay demeanour. Had he not reasoned the whole matter out with himself? He had foreseen this crisis ; he had nerved himself by anticipation.

"Oh I know. I know already, Yolande," said he, very cheerfully. "Do you think I can't spy secrets? And of course you come to me, with your hands trembling ; and you think you have something dreadful to confess ; whereas it is nothing but the most ordinary and commonplace thing in the world. You need not make any confession. Young Leslie has spoken to me—quite right ; very right ; I like frankness ; I consider him a very fine young fellow. Now what have you got to say—only I won't listen if you are going to make a fuss about it and destroy my nervous system, for I tell you it is the simplest and most ordinary affair in the world."

"Then you know everything—you approve of it, papa—it is your wish?" she said, bravely.

"My wish?" he said ; "what has my wish to do with it, you stupid creature !" But then he added, more gently : "Of course you know, Yolande, I should like to see you married and settled. Yes, I should like to see that ; I should like to see you in a fixed home, and not liable to all the changes and chances of the life that you and I have been living. It would be a great relief to my mind. And then it is natural and right. It is not for a young girl to be a rolling-stone like that ; and, besides, it couldn't last : that idea about our always going on travelling wouldn't answer. So whenever you think of

marrying ; whenever you think you will be happy in choosing a husband —just now, to-morrow, or any time—don't come to me with a breathless voice, and with trembling hands as if you had done some wrong, or as if I was going to object, for to see you happy would be happiness enough for me ; and as for our society together, well, you know, I could pay the people of Slagpool a little more attention, and have some more occupation that way ; and then you, instead of having an old and frail and feeble person like me to take care of you, you would have one whose years would make him a fitter companion for you, as is quite right and proper and natural. And now do you understand ?”

“ Oh yes, I think so, papa,” said she, quite brightly ; and she regarded him with grateful and loving eyes. “ And you would have ever so much more time for Parliament, would you not ? ”

“ Assuredly.”

“ And you would come to see me sometimes, and go shooting and fishing, and take a real holiday—not in towns and hotels ? ”

“ Oh, don't be afraid. I will bother the life out of you. And there are always fishings and shootings to be got somehow.”

“ And you would be quite happy, then ? ”

“ If you were, I should be,” said he ; and really this prospect pleased him so much that his cheerfulness now was scarcely forced. “ Always on this distinct and clear understanding,” he added, “ that, when we are coming back from the shooting, you will come out to meet us and walk back with us the last half mile.”

“ I should be dressing for dinner, papa,” she said. “ And just worrying my head off to think what would please you.”

“ You will be dressing to please your husband, you foolish creature, not me.”

“ He won't care as much as you, papa.” Then she added, after a second : “ I should get the London newspapers, yes ? Quite easily ? Do you know, papa, what Colonel Graham believes ?—that they are going to take one of the extreme Liberals into the Ministry, to please the northern towns.”

“ But what has that got to do with you, child ? ” said he,

with a laugh. "Very likely they may. But you didn't bring me over here to talk politics?"

"But even if you were in the Government, papa, you would have your holiday-time all the same," she said, thoughtfully.

"I a member of the Government?" said he. "You may as well expect to hear of me being sent to arrest the false prophet in the Soudan. Come away, then, Yolande; your secret is not a secret; so you need not trouble about it; and now that I have expounded my views on the situation, you may as well go and call to Ahmed that I want another cup of coffee."

And then he hesitated.

"You have not said yes or no yet, Yolande?"

"Oh no; how could I, until I knew what you might think?" said she, and she regarded him now with frank and unclouded eyes. "How could I? It might not have been agreeable to your wishes. But I was told that you would approve. At first—well, it is a sudden thing to give up visions you have formed; but when you see it is not practicable and reasonable, what is it but a small struggle? No; other plans present themselves—oh yes, I have much to think of now that looks very pleasant to anticipate. Very much to look forward to—to hope for."

He patted her lightly on the shoulder.

"And if you make half as good a wife, Yolande, as you have been a daughter, you will do pretty well."

They went back to their friends, their absence scarcely having been noticed; for Ismat Effendi was a fluent and interesting talker. And whether Mr. Winterbourne had been playing a part or not in his interview with Yolande, that cheerfulness of his soon left him. He sat somewhat apart, and silent; his eyes were fixed on the deck; he was not listening. Yolande herself brought him the coffee; and she put her hand on his shoulder, and stood by him; then he brightened up somewhat. But he was thoughtful and distraught for the whole of the evening, except when he happened to be spoken to by Yolande, and then he would summon up some of his customary humour, and petulantly complain about her un-English idioms.

And she? Her anxiety and nervousness seemed to have

vanished. It is true she rather avoided the Master of Lynn, and rarely ventured to look in his direction; but she was in good spirits, cheerful, practical, self-possessed; and when Ismat Effendi, on going away, apologised to her for having talked tedious politics all the evening, she said with a charming smile—

“No; not at all. How can politics be tedious? Ah, but we will have our revenge, perhaps, in Scotland. Mrs. Graham says that in their house it is nothing but deer that is talked of all the evening; that will not interest you?”

“I shall rejoice to be allowed to try,” said the polite young Egyptian; and then he shook hands with her, and bowed very low, and left.

During the rest of the evening the Master of Lynn, seeing that Yolande seemed no longer in any trouble, kept near her, with some vague hope that she would herself speak, or that he might have some chance of reopening the subject that engrossed his mind. And indeed, when the chance arrived, and he timidly asked her if she had not a word of hope for him, she spoke very frankly, though with some little nervousness, no doubt. She made a little apology, in very pretty and stammering phrases, for not having been able to give him an answer; but since then, she said, she had spoken to her father, without whose approval she could not have decided.

“Then you consent, Yolande—you will be my wife?” he said, in a low and eager voice, upsetting in his haste all the continuity of those hesitating sentences.

“But is it wise?” said she, still with her eyes cast down. “Perhaps you will regret——”

He took her hand into his, and held it tight.

“This has been a lucky voyage for me,” said he; and that was all that he had a chance of saying just then; but it was enough.

Colonel Graham heard the news that same evening. He was a man of solid and fixed ideas.

“A very good thing, too,” said he to his wife. “A very good thing. Now they’ll take the sheep off Allt-nam-ba, and make Corrievreak the sanctuary. Nothing could have happened better.”

CHAPTER XV.

NEW PLANS.

EARLY next morning, and long before any one on board the dahabeeah was awake, Mr. Winterbourne was seated in the quiet little saloon writing the following letter :—

“Near Merhadj, on the Nile, May 13.

“Dear Shortlands—I have news for you. You will be glad to learn that Yolande is engaged to be married—I think with every prospect of happiness ; and you will also be glad to know that I heartily approve, and that so far from viewing the coming change with dread, I rather welcome it, and look on it as the final removal of one of the great anxieties of my life. Sometimes I wonder at myself, though. Yolande and I have been so much to each other. And I daresay I shall feel her absence for a while. But what does it matter ? My life has been broken and wasted ; what remains of it is of little consequence ; if her life be made the fuller and happier and more secured ; and I think there is every chance of that. After all, this definite separation will be better than a series of small separations, haunted by continual fears. She will be removed from all the possibilities you know of. As for me, what does it matter, as I say ? And so I have come to regard the handing over of my Yolande to somebody else as not such a hard matter after all ; nay, I am looking forward to it with a kind of satisfaction. When I can see her securely married and happily settled in a home, that will be enough for me ; and maybe I may have a chance from time to time of regarding the pride and pleasure of the young house-mistress.

“The accepted suitor is Mrs. Graham’s brother (I think you know we came away with Colonel Graham, of Inverstry, and his wife ?), and the only son of Lord Lynn. I have had a good opportunity of studying his character ; and you may imagine that, when I saw a prospect of this happening, I regarded him very closely and jealously. Well, I must say that his qualities bore the scrutiny well. I think he is an honest and honourable young fellow ; of fair abilities ; very

pleasant and courteous in manner (what I especially like in him is the consideration and respect he pays to women, which seems to be unusual nowadays ; he doesn't stand and stare at them with a toothpick in his mouth) ; I hear he is one of the best deer-stalkers in the Highlands, and that speaks well for his hardihood and his temperance ; he is not brilliant, but he is good-natured, which is of more importance in the long run ; he is cheerful and high-spirited, which naturally follows from his excellent constitution : deer-stalking does not tend to congestion of the liver and bilious headache ; he is good-looking, but not vain ; and he is scrupulously exact in money matters. Indeed, he is almost too exact, if criticism were to be so minute, for it looks just a little bit odd, when we are playing cards for counters at three pence a dozen, to see the heir of the House of Lynn so very particular in claiming his due of two-pence-halfpenny. But this little weakness is forgivable ; to be prudent and economical is a very good failing in a young man ; and then you must remember his training. The Leslies have been poor for several generations ; but they have steadily applied themselves to the retrieving of their condition and the bettering of the estate ; and it is only by the exercise of severe economy that they now stand in so good a position. So, doubtless, this young fellow has acquired the habit of being particular about trifles ; and I don't object ; from my point of view it is rather praiseworthy ; Yolande's fortune—and she shall have the bulk of what I have—will be placed in good and careful hands.

“So now all this is well and happily settled ; and, as every one bids fair to be content, you will ask what more we have to do than to look forward to the wedding, and the slippers, and the handfuls of rice. Well, it is the old story ; and you, as an old friend, will understand. That is why I write to you, after a wakeful enough night—for the sake of unburdening myself, even though I can't get a word of your sturdy counsel at this great distance. As I say, it is the old story. For the moment you delude yourself into the belief that the time of peril and anxiety is past ; everything is safe now for the future ; with Yolande's life made secure and happy, what matters what happens elsewhere ? And the next moment new anxieties present themselves ; the old dread returns ; doubts whether

you have acted for the best ; and fears about this future that seemed so bright. There is one point about these Leslies that I forgot to mention ; they are all of them apparently—and young Leslie especially—very proud of the family name and jealous of the family honour. I do not wonder at it. They have every right to be ; and it is rather a praiseworthy quality. But now you will understand, old friend, the perplexity I am in—afraid to make any revelation that might disturb the settlement which seems so fortunate a one, and yet afraid to transfer to the future all those risks and anxieties that have made the past so bitter and so terrible to me. I do not know what to do. Perhaps I should have stated the whole matter plainly to the young man when he came and asked permission to propose to Yolande ; but then I was thinking, not of that at all, but only of her happiness. It seemed so easy and safe a way out of all that old trouble. And why should he have been burdened with a secret which he dared not reveal to her ? I thought of Yolande being taken away to that Highland home—living content and happy all through her life ; and it did not occur to me to imperil that prospect by any disclosure of what could concern neither her nor him. But now I have begun to torture myself in the old way again, and in spite of myself conjure up all sorts of ghastly anticipations. The fit does not last long ; if you were here, with your firm way of looking at things, possibly I could drive away these imaginings altogether ; but you will understand me when I say that I could wish to see Yolande married to-morrow and carried away to the Highlands. Then I could meet my own troubles well enough.”

He was startled by the rustling of a dress—he looked up, and there was Yolande herself, regarding him with a bright and happy and smiling face, in which there was a trifle of surprise, and also perhaps a faint flush of self-consciousness, for it was but the previous evening that she had told him of the engagement. But surely one glance of that face—so young, and cheerful, and confident—was enough to dispel those dark forebodings. The page of life lying open there was not the one on which to write down prognostications of trouble and sorrow. His eyes lit up with pleasure ; the glooms of the night were suddenly forgotten.

"Writing? Already?" she said, as she went forward and kissed him.

"You are looking very well this morning, Yolande," he said, regarding her. "The silence of the boat does not keep you from sleeping, apparently, as it sometimes does with older folk. But where is your snood?—the colour suits your hair."

"Oh, I am not in the Highlands yet," she said lightly. "Do you know the song Mrs. Graham sings?—

'It's I would give my silken snood
To see the gallant Grahams come hame.'

That was in the days of their banishment."

"But what have you to do with the home-coming of the Grahams, Yolande?" her father said, to tease her. "You will be a Leslie, not a Graham."

She changed the topic quickly.

"To whom are you writing?"

"To John Shortlands."

"May I see?"

She would have taken up the letter, had he not hastily interposed.

"No——"

"Ah, it is about business. Very well. But I may put in a postscript?"

"What do you want to write to Mr. Shortlands about?" her father said, in amazement.

"Perhaps it will be better for you to write, then. I was going to ask him to visit us at Allt-nam-ba."

"Well, now, Yolande, that is a most excellent idea!" he exclaimed. "You are really becoming quite a sensible and practical person. We shall want another gun. John Shortlands is just the man."

"We can give him," said she, sedately, "the bed-room over the dining-room; that will be farthest away from the noise of the kennels."

Then he stared at her.

"What on earth do you know about the bed-room over the dining-room, or the kennels either?"

"Mr. Leslie," said she, with a momentary flush, "gave me a plan of the house—there it is, papa. Oh, you shall have no trouble—it is all quite easily arranged——"

She took out a piece of paper from her note-book, unfolded it, and put it before him.

"There," said she, with a practical air, "is a very good room—that looks down the glen—that is for you. That one is for a visitor—yes, Mr. Shortlands, if he will come—so that he shall not be disturbed by the dogs. That one for me——"

"But why should you be disturbed by the dogs?"

"Me? Oh no! I shall be used to it. Besides," she said, with a laugh, "there is nothing that will disturb me—no, not the cockatoo at the Château that Madame did not keep more than three days."

"But look here, Yolande," said he, gravely. "I am afraid you are going to attempt too much. Why should you? Why should you bother? I can pay to get somebody to do all that. It's all very well for Mrs. Graham, who has all her servants about her, trained to help her. And she has been at the thing for years. But really, Yolande, you are taking too great a responsibility; and why should you worry yourself when I can pay to get it done? I daresay there are people who will provision a house as you provision a yacht, and take back the surplus stores. I don't know; I suppose so. In any case, I can hire a housekeeper up there——"

She put her hand on his mouth.

"No—no—no," she said, triumphantly. "Why, it is all arranged—long ago—all settled—every small point. Do I not know what cartridges to buy for you, for the rifle that Mr. Leslie is to lend you—do I not know even that small point?"

She referred to her note-book.

"There it is," she said. "Eley-Boxer, 500 bore, for express rifle——"

"Well, you know, Yolande," said he, to test her, "I should have thought that when the Master proposed to lend me a rifle, he might have presented me with some cartridges, instead of letting me buy them for myself."

But she did not see the point.

"Perhaps he did not remember," said she, lightly. "Perhaps it is not customary. No matter; I shall have them. It is very obliging that you get the loan of the rifle. Quand on emprunte, on ne choisit pas."

“Very well, then ; go away, and let me finish my letter,” said he, good-naturedly.

When she had gone he turned the sheet of paper that he had placed face downwards, and continued :

“When I had written the above, Yolande came into the saloon. She has just gone, and everything is changed. It is impossible to look at her—so full of hope and life and cheerfulness—and be downcast about the future. It appears to me now that whatever trouble may befall will affect me only ; and that that does not much matter ; and that she will be living a happy life far away there, in the north, without a care. Is it not quite simple ? She will no longer bear my name. Even if she were to come to London—though it is far from probable they will ever have a London house, even for the season—she will come either as the Hon. Mrs. Leslie or as Lady Lynn ; and nothing could occur to alarm her or annoy her husband. Everything appears to have happened for the best ; and I don’t see how any *contretemps* could arise. When we return to England, the proposal is that Yolande should go on with the Grahams to Inverstry, until I go down to a shooting that I have rented for the season from Lord Lynn—Allt-nam-ba is the name of the place—and there we should be for the following three months. I don’t know how long the engagement of the young people is likely to last ; but I should say they knew each other pretty well after being constantly in each other’s society all this time ; and I, of course, could wish for nothing better than a speedy marriage. Nor will there be any risk about that. Whether it takes place in the Highlands, or at Weybridge, or anywhere else, there needs be no great ceremony or publicity ; and I would gladly pay for a special license, which I could fairly do on the plea that it was merely a whim of my own.

“Now as for yourself, dear old boy. Would you be surprised to hear that Yolande has just suggested—entirely her own suggestion, mind—that you should come and pay us a visit at that shooting-box ? She has even decided that you are to have the bed-room farthest removed from the noise of the kennels. I do hope you will be able to go down with me for the Twelfth. With decent shooting, and if the moor is in its normal state, they say we should get 1000 or 1200 brace ;

and besides that, the moor abuts on three deer forests, and there is no reason, moral or legal, why you shouldn't have a shot at such *feræ naturæ* as may stray on to your ground. And then (which is, perhaps, a more important thing—at all events, you would be interested, for I think you rather like the child) you would see what kind of a choice Yolande has made. I hope I am not blinded by my own wishes ; but it seems as if everything promised well.

“ There is another thing I want to mention to you before I close this screed—which more resembles the letters of our youth than the *staccato* notes they call letters nowadays. I have talked to you about this engagement as if it were a good arrangement—a solution, in fact, of a very awkward problem ; but don't think for a moment that, when they do marry, it will be anything but a marriage of affection. Mr. Leslie is not so poor that he needs to marry for money—on the contrary, the family are fairly well off now, and the estates almost free ; and Yolande, on the other hand, is not the sort of creature to marry for title or social position. I saw that he was drawing towards her a long time ago—as far back, indeed, as the time of our arriving at Malta ; and as for her, she made a friend and companion of him almost at the beginning of the voyage in a way very unusual with her ; for I have noticed again and again, in travelling, how extremely reserved she was when any one seemed anxious to make her acquaintance. No doubt the fact that he was Mrs. Graham's brother had something to do with it ; for the Grahams were very kind to her at Oatlands—and have been ever since, I need hardly say. It will be very pleasant to her to have such agreeable neighbours when she marries. Mrs. Graham treats her like a sister already ; she will not be going among strange kinsfolk ; nor among those likely to judge her harshly.

“ So far we have enjoyed the trip very well ; though, of course, to some of us its chief interest lay in this little drama that now points, I hope, to a happy conclusion. We have had the whole Nile to ourselves—all the tourists gone long ago. The heat considerable : yesterday at mid-day it was 108 degrees in the shade ; but it is a dry heat, and not debilitating. Of course we keep under shelter on the hottest days. I hear that the wine at dinner is of a temperature of 90 degrees—there being

no ice ; so that we abstainers have rather the best of it, the water, kept in porous jars, being much cooler than that. We visit Merhadj to-day ; and thereafter begin a series of excursions in the neighbourhood—if all goes well. But we heard some ugly rumours in Cairo, and may at any moment have to beat a swift retreat.

“As soon as I get back I shall begin my Parliamentary attendance again, and stick close to work until the end of the Session ; and I have no doubt the Government will give me plenty of chances of reminding the Slagpool people of my existence. I wish you would have a paragraph put in one of the London papers to the effect that the health of the member for Slagpool being now almost re-established by his visit to Egypt, he will in a few weeks be able to take his place again in the House. Then the Slagpool papers would copy. They have been very forbearing with me, those people ; I suppose it is because I bully them. They would have turned out any more complaisant person long ago.

“Yolande—still harping on his daughter, you will say ; but it is only for a little while ; soon I shall see and hear little enough of her—has undertaken the whole control and household management of the shooting-box ; and I daresay she will make a hash of it ; but I don't think you will be severe on her, if, as I hope, you can come to us. It will be an occupation and amusement for her while she is in the Highlands ; and I am very glad she is going to be with the Grahams during that interval. She wearied a good deal at Oatlands Park, though she tried not to show it ; and as for ever having her in London again—no, that is impossible. Mrs. Leslie or Lady Lynn may come and live in London when she pleases—though I hope it may be many a year before she does so—but not Yolande Winterbourne. Poor child, she little knows what kind of a shadow there is behind her fair and bright young life. I hope she will never know ; I am beginning to believe now that she will never know ; and this that has just happened ought to give one courage and strength.

“Do not attempt to answer this letter. The writing of it has been a relief to me. I may be back in town very shortly after you get it ; for we shall only stay in Cairo a few days to

get some things for Yolande that may be of service to her after.—Always your friend,

“G. R. WINTERBOURNE.

“*P.S.*—I should not wonder at all, if, before this letter gets posted even, that torment of fear and nervous apprehension should again get possession of me. I wish the marriage were well over, and I left alone in London.”

The various noises throughout the dahabeeah now told him that all the people were stirring; he carefully folded this letter, and put it in his pocket (that he might read it over again at his leisure); and then he went out and up the stairs to the higher deck. Yolande was leaning with her elbows on the rail, gazing out on the wide waters and the far wastes of sand. She did not hear him approach; she was carelessly singing to herself some snatch of a French song, and doubtless not thinking at all how inappropriate the words were:—

“Ohé ! . . . c’est la terra de France !
Ohé ! . . . Garçons ! bonne espérance !
Vois-tu, là-bas, sous le ciel gris
A l’horizon ? . . . C’est le pays !
Madelon, Périne
Toinon, Catherine——”

“Yolande,” said he, and she started and turned round quickly.

“Why, you don’t seem to consider that you have taken a very serious step in life,” he said, with a smile.

“Moi ?”

Then she recalled herself to her proper tongue.

“I think it pleases every one; do you not?” she said, brightly; and there were no more forebodings possible when he found himself, as now, face to face with the shining cheerfulness of her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

OBEDIENCE.

YOLANDE was right on that one point at least; every one seemed greatly pleased. There was a new and obvious satisfaction permeating all through this little party in exile. Mrs. Graham was more affectionate than ever—it was “dear Yolande” every other minute; Colonel Graham was assiduous in giving her perfectly idiotic advice about her housekeeping at Allt-nam-ba; and the Master of Lynn sought, but sought in vain, for opportunities of having little confidential talks with her. And the most light-hearted of them all was Yolande herself. Her decision once given, she seemed to trouble herself no more about the future. Every one was pleased; so was she. She betrayed no concern; she was not embarrassed by that increase of attention and kindness which, however slight, was easily recognisable and significant. To all appearance she was occupied, not in the least with her future duties as a wife, but solely and delightedly with preparations for the approaching visit to Merhadj; and she was right thankful that they were going by water, for on two occasions they had found the sand of the river-bank to be of a temperature of 140 degrees in the sun, which was not very pleasant for women-folk wearing thin-soled boots.

When they had got into the stern of the big boat, and were being rowed up the wide yellow-green river, her father could not help regarding this gaiety of demeanour with an increasing wonder, and even with a touch of apprehensive doubt. And then again he argued with himself. Why should she anticipate the gravities of life? Why should she not be careless and light-hearted, and happy in the small excitements of the moment? Would it not be time to face the evil days, if there were to be any such, when they came? And why should they come at all? Surely some lives were destined for peace. Why should not the story of her life be like the scene now around them—placid, beautiful, and calm, with unclouded skies? To some that was given; and Yolande (he gradually convinced himself) would be one of those. To look at her

face—so full of life and pleasure and bright cheerfulness—was to acquire hope ; it was not possible to associate misery or despair with those clear-shining confident eyes. Her life (he returned to the fancy) was to be like the scenery in which the courtship and engagement passage of it had chanced to occur—pretty, placid, unclouded, not too romantic. And so by the time they reached Merhadj he had grown to be, or had forced himself to appear, as cheerful as any of them. He knew he was nervous, fretful, and liable to gloomy anticipations ; but he also had a certain power of fighting against these, and that he could do best when Yolande was actually beside him. And was she not there now—merry and laughing and delighted ; eagerly interested in these new scenes, and trying to talk to every one at once ? He began to share in her excitement ; he forgot about those vague horoscopes ; it was the crowd of boats, and the children swimming in the Nile, and the women coming down with pitchers on their heads, and all the other busy and picturesque features along the shore, that he was looking at, because she also was looking at them ; and it was no visionary Yolande of the future, but the very sensible and practical and light-hearted Yolande of that very moment, that he had to grip by the arm, with an angry remonstrance about her attempting to walk down the gangboard by herself. Yolande laughed ; she never believed much in her father's anger.

They got ashore to find themselves in the midst of a frightful tumult and confusion—at least, so it appeared to them after the silence and seclusion of the dahabeeah. Donkeys were being driven down to the river, raising clouds of dust as they came trotting along ; the banks swarmed with mules and camels and water-carriers ; the women were filling their pitchers, the boys their pig-skin vessels ; the children were driving and splashing and calling ; and altogether the bustle and clamour seemed different enough from the ordinary repose of Eastern life, and were even a trifle bewildering. But in the midst of it all appeared young Ismat Effendi, who came hurrying down the bank to offer a hundred eager apologies for his not having been in time to receive them ; and under his guidance they got away from the noise and squalor, and proceeded to cross a large open square, planted with a few

acacia-trees, to the Governor's house just outside the town. The young Ismat was delighted to be the escort of those two English ladies. He talked very fast ; his eyes were eloquent ; and his smiling face showed how proud and pleased he was. And would they go through the town with him after they had done his father the honour of a visit ?

"The bazaars are not like Cairo," said he. "No ; no ; who could expect that ? We are a small town ; but we are more Egyptian than Cairo ; we are not half foreign, like Cairo."

"I am sure it will be all the more interesting on that account," said Mrs. Graham, graciously ; and Yolande was pleased to express the same opinion ; and young Ismat Effendi's face seemed to say that a great honour had been conferred on him and on Merhadj.

And indeed they were sufficiently interested in what they could already see of the place—this wide sandy square, with its acacias in tubs, its strings of donkeys and camels, its veiled women and dusky men ; with the high bare walls of a mosque, the tapering minaret, some lower walls of houses, and everywhere a profusion of palms that bounded the farther side.

"Hillo, Mr. Ismat," called out Colonel Graham, as two gangs of villainous-looking convicts, all chained to each other, came along, under guard of a couple of soldiers. "What have these fellows been doing ?"

"They are prisoners," said he, carelessly. "They have killed somebody, or stolen something. We make them carry water."

The next new feature was a company of soldiers in white tunics and trousers and red tarbooshes, who marched quickly along to the shrill sharp music of bugles. They disappeared into the archway of a large square building.

"That is my father's house," exclaimed young Ismat to the ladies. "He looks to your visit with great pleasure. And the other gentlemen of the town, they are there also ; and the chief engineer of the district ; your coming is a great honour to us."

"I wish I knew a little Arabic," said Mrs. Graham. "I am sure we have not thanked his Excellency half enough for his kindness in lending us his dahabeeah."

"Oh, quite enough, quite enough!" said the polite young Egyptian. "I assure you it is nothing. Though it is a pity my father does not understand English—and not much French, either. He has been very busy all his life, and not travelling. The other gentlemen speak French, like most of the official Egyptians."

"And you," said Mrs. Graham, regarding him with her pretty eyes,—“do you speak French as well as you speak English?”

"My English!" he said, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "It is very bad. I know, it is very, very bad—I have never been in England—I have had no practice except a little in India. But, on the contrary, I have lived three years in Paris; French is much more natural to me than English."

"It is so with me also, Mr. Ismat," said Yolande, a trifle shyly.

"With you!" he exclaimed.

"I have lived nearly all my life in France. But your English, that you speak of, is not in the least bad. It is very good; is it not, Mrs. Graham?"

Nothing further could be said on that point, however, for they were just escaping from the glare of the sun into a cool high archway; and from that they passed into a wide, open courtyard, where the guard of soldiers they had seen enter presented arms. They then ascended some steps; and finally were ushered into a large and lofty and barely-furnished saloon, where the Governor and the notables of Merhadj received them with much serious courtesy. But this interview, as it turned out, was not quite so solemn as that on the deck of the dahabeeah; for, after what Ismat Effendi had said to the two ladies without, it was but natural that the conversation should be conducted in French; and so the coffee and cigarettes which were brought in by two young lads were partaken of in anything but silence. And then, as little groups were thus formed, and as Ismat's services as interpreter were not in such constant demand, he somehow came to devote himself to the two ladies, and as Yolande naturally spoke French with much more ease and fluency than Mrs. Graham, to her he chiefly addressed himself. The Master of Lynn did not at all like this arrangement. He was silent and impatient.

He regarded this Frenchified Arab, who seemed to consider himself so fascinating, with a goodly measure of robust English contempt. And then he grew angry with his sister. She ought not to be, and she ought not to permit Yolande to be, so familiar with this Egyptian fellow. Did she not know that Egyptian ladies studiously kept their faces concealed? And what must he be thinking of these two English ladies, who laughed and chatted in this free and easy fashion?

Then, as regarded Yolande, his gratitude for the great gift she had given him was still full in his mind, and he was willing to make every excuse for her, and to treat her with a manly forbearance and leniency; but at the same time he could not get rid of a certain consciousness that she did not seem to recognise as she ought that he had, in a way, a right of possession. She bore herself to him just as she bore herself to the others; if there was any one of the party whom she seemed specially to favour that morning as they came up the Nile, it was Colonel Graham, who did nothing but tease her. She did not seem to think there was any difference between yesterday and to-day; whereas yesterday she was free, and to-day she was a promised bride. However, he threw most of the blame on his sister. Polly was always trying the effect of her eyes on somebody; and this Egyptian was as good as another. And he wondered how Graham allowed it.

But matters grew worse when this ceremonious interview was over. For when they went to explore the narrow, twisting, mud-paved, and apparently endless bazaars of Merhadj, where there was scarcely room for the camels and donkeys to pass without bumping them against the walls or shop doors, of course they had to go two and two; and as young Ismat had to lead the way, and as he naturally continued to talk to the person with whom he had been talking within, it fell out that Yolande and he were the first pair; the others following as they pleased. Once or twice the Master struggled forward through the crowd and the dust and the donkeys, and tried to detach Yolande from her companion; but in each case some circumstance happened to intervene, and he failed; and the consequence was that, bringing up the rear with Mr. Winterbourne, who was not a talkative person, he had abundant leisure to nurse his wrath in silence. And he felt he had a

right to be angry, though it was not perhaps altogether her fault. She did not seem to understand that there were relations existing between engaged people different from those existing between others. He had acquired a certain right ; so, in fact, had she ; for he put it to himself whether, supposing he had had the chance of walking through those miserable little streets of Merhadj with the prettiest young Englishwoman who ever lived, he would have deserted Yolande for her side. No, he would not. And he thought that he ought to remonstrate, and that he would remonstrate ; but yet in a kindly way, so that no offence could be taken. It could be no offence, surely, to beg from her just a little bit more of her favour.

Meanwhile, this was the conversation of those two in front, as they slowly made their way along the tortuous, catacomb-looking thoroughfare, with its dusky little shops, in the darkness of each of which sat the merchant, cross-legged, and gazing impassively out from under his large white turban.

"What is it, then, you wish?" he was saying to her ; and he spoke in French that was much more idiomatic, if not any more fluent, than his English. "Curiosities? Bric-à-brac?"

"It is something very Eastern, very Egyptian, that I could send to the ladies at the Château where I was brought up," she said, as she attentively scanned each gloomy recess. "And also I would like to buy something for Mrs. Graham—a little present—I know not what. Also for my papa. Is there nothing very strange—very curious?"

"But alas! Mademoiselle," said he, "we have here no manufactures. Our business of the neighbourhood is agriculture. All these articles in the bazaar are from Cairo ; we have not even any of the Assiout pottery, which is pretty and curious, but perhaps not safe to carry on a long journey. The silver jewellery is all from Cairo ; those silks from Cairo also ; those cottons from England——"

"At Cairo, then, one could purchase some things truly Egyptian?"

"Certainly—certainly, Mademoiselle, you will find the bazaars at Cairo full of interest. Ah, I wish with all my heart I could accompany you!"

"That would be to encroach entirely too much on your goodness," said she, with a pleasant smile.

"Not at all," said he, earnestly. "Ah no ; not at all. It is so charming to find one's self for a time in new society ; and if one can be of a little assistance, that is so much the better. Then there is also something I would speak to Monsieur your father about, Mademoiselle, before you return to the dahabeeah. I have arranged one or two excursions for you, which may interest you, perhaps ; and the necessary means are all prepared ; and I think it might be of advantage to begin these at once. There is no danger—no, no ; there is no cause for any alarm ; but always of late the political atmosphere has been somewhat disturbed ; and if you were at Cairo, you would find out better what was going to happen than we ourselves do here. Then, as you have said, you would wish to buy some things ; and you will have need of plenty of time to go through the bazaars——"

He seemed to speak with a little caution at this point.

"I have heard the gentlemen speak of it," said she, with no great concern, for she was far from being a nervous person ; "but they seemed to think there was no danger."

"Danger ? No, no," said he. "For you there can be no danger. But if there is political disquiet and disturbance, it might not be quite agreeable for you ; and that is all I wish to say to Monsieur your father, that he would have the goodness to make the excursions as soon as possible, and so leave more time for judging the situation. It is a hint—it is a suggestion—that is all."

"I am sure that my papa and Colonel Graham will do whatever you think best," said she.

"You are very good, Mademoiselle. I wish to serve them," said he, with great courtesy.

Well, not only did this young man—whether intentionally or not, it was impossible to say—monopolise Yolande's society during the remainder of their exploration of Merhadj, but furthermore, on their embarking in their boat to return, he accepted an invitation to dine with them that same evening ; and the Master of Lynn was determined that, before young Ismat put foot on board the dahabeeah, Yolande would be civilly but firmly requested to amend her ways. It was all very well for his sister, who was a born flirt, to go about making great friends with strangers ; and it was all very well

for Colonel Graham, who was too lazy to care about anything, to look on with good-humoured indifference. But already this audacious youth had begun to pose Yolande as an exalted being. She knew nothing about garrison life in India.

He had very considerable difficulty in obtaining a private conversation with Yolande, for life on board the dahabeeah was distinctly public and social; but late on in the afternoon he succeeded.

"So, Yolande," said he, with an artful carelessness, "this has been the first day of our engagement."

"Oh yes," said she, looking up in a pleasant way.

"We haven't seen much of each other," he suggested.

"Ah no; it has been such a busy day. How much nicer is the quiet here, is it not?"

"But you seemed to find Ismat Effendi sufficiently amusing," he said, somewhat coldly.

"Oh yes," she answered, quite frankly. "And so clever and intelligent. I hope we shall see him when he comes to England."

"I thought," said he, "that in France young ladies were brought up to be rather reserved—that they were not supposed to become so friendly with chance acquaintances."

Perhaps there was something in the tone that caused her to look up, this time rather seriously.

"I should not call him a chance acquaintance," she said, slowly. "He is the friend of Colonel Graham, and of papa, and of yourself." And then she added, speaking still slowly, and still regarding him: "Did you think I was not enough reserved?"

Well, there was a kind of obedience in her manner—a sort of biddableness in her eyes—that entirely took the wind out of the sails of his intended reproof.

"You see, Yolande," said he, in a much more friendly way, "perhaps it was mere bad luck; but after getting engaged only last night, you may imagine I wanted to see a little of you to-day; and you can't suppose that I quite liked that Egyptian fellow monopolising you the whole time. Of course, I am not jealous—and not jealous of that fellow!—for jealousy implies suspicion: and I know you too well. But perhaps you don't quite understand that people who are

engaged have a little claim on each other, and expect to be treated with a little more intimacy and friendliness than as if they were outsiders."

"Oh yes, I understand," she said, with her eyes cast down.

"Of course, I am not complaining," he continued, in the most amiable way. "It would be a curious thing if I were to begin to complain now, after what you said last night. But you can't wonder if I am anxious to have all your kindness to myself; and that I should like you and me to have different relations between ourselves from those we have with other people. An engagement means giving up something on both sides, I suppose. Do you think I should like to see you waltzing with any one else now? It isn't in human nature that I should like it."

"Then I will not waltz with any one," she said, still looking down.

"And I don't think you will find me a tyrannous sort of person, Yolande," said he, with a smile, "even if you were inclined to make an engagement a much more serious matter than you seem to consider it. It is more likely you who will prove the tyrant; for you have your own way with everybody; and why not with me too? And I hope you understand why I spoke, don't you? You don't think it unkind?"

"Oh no, I quite understand," she said, in the same low voice.

Ismat Effendi came to dinner, as he had promised. She spoke scarcely a word to him the whole evening.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CHAT IN THE DESERT.

"ARCHIE," said his sister, on one occasion, in rather a significant tone, "you will have some trouble with papa."

They were on their way to visit a convent some few miles inland, and the only thing that varied the monotony of the journey was the occasional stumbling of the wretched animals they rode. He glanced round, to see that the others were far enough off; then he said, either carelessly or with an affectation of carelessness—

"I daresay. Oh yes, I have no doubt of it. But there would have been a row in any case; so it does not matter much. If I had brought home the daughter of an archangel, he would have growled and grumbled. He gave you a pretty warm time of it, Polly, before he let you marry Graham."

And then he said, with more vehemence—

"Hang it all, my father doesn't understand the condition of things nowadays! The peerage isn't sacred any longer; you can't expect people to keep on intermarrying and intermarrying, just to please Burke. We can show a pretty good list you know; and I wouldn't add any name to it that would disgrace it; but that craze of my father's is all nonsense. Why, the only place nowadays where a lord is worshipped and glorified is the United States; that's where I should have gone if I had wanted to marry for money; I daresay they would have found out that sooner or later I should succeed to a peerage. Of course, my father is treated with great respect when he goes to attend meetings at Inverness; and the keepers and gillies think he is the greatest man in the kingdom; but what would he be in London? Why, there you find governing England a commoner, whose family made their money in business; and under him—and glad enough to take office, too—noblemen whose names are as old as the history of England——"

His sister interrupted him.

"My dear Master," said she, "please remember that because a girl is pretty her father's politics are not necessarily right. If you have imbibed those frightful sentiments from Mr. Winterbourne, for goodness' sake say nothing about them at the Towers. The matter will be difficult enough without that. You see, with anybody else, it might be practicable to shelve politics; but Mr. Winterbourne's views and opinions are too widely known. And you will have quite enough difficulty in getting papa to receive Mr. Winterbourne with decent civility, without your talking any wild Radicalism in that way."

"Radicalism?" said he. "It is not Radicalism. It is common sense, which is just the reverse of Radicalism. However, what I have resolved on is this, Polly: his lordship shall remain in complete ignorance of the whole affair until Yolande goes to Allt-nam-ba. Then he will see her. That ought to

do something to smoothe the way? There is another thing, too. Winterbourne has taken Allt-nam-ba; and my father ought to be well disposed to him on that account alone."

"Because a gentleman rents a shooting from you for one year——"

"But why one year?" he interposed, quickly. "Why shouldn't Winterbourne take a lease of it? He can well afford it. And with Yolande living up there, of course he would like to come and see her sometimes; and Allt-nam-ba is just the place for a man to bring a bachelor friend or two with him from London. He can well afford it. It is his only amusement. It would be a good arrangement for me, too; for I could lend him a hand—and the moor wants hard shooting, else we shall be having the disease back again some fine day. Then we should continue to let the forest."

"And where are you and Yolande going to live then?" said his sister, regarding him with a curious look. "Are you going to install her as mistress of the Towers?"

"Take her to Lynn!" he said, with a scornful laugh. "Yes, I should think so! Cage her up with that old cat, indeed!"

"She is my aunt as well as yours, and I will not have her spoken of like that," said Mrs. Graham, sharply.

"She is my aunt," said this young man. "And she is yours; and she is an old cat as well. Never mind, Polly. You will see such things at Lynn as your small head never dreamed of. The place has just been starved for want of money. You must see that when you think of Inverstroy: look how well everything is done there. And then, when you consider how we have been working to pay off scores run up by other people—that seems rather hard, doesn't it?——"

"I don't think so—I don't think so at all!" his sister said, promptly. "Our family may have made mistakes in politics; but that was better than always truckling to the winning side. We have nothing to be ashamed of. And you ought to be very glad that so much of the land remains ours——"

"Well, you will see what can be made of it," her brother said, confidently. "I don't regret now the long struggle to keep the place together; and once we get back to Corrievreak, we'll have the watershed for the march again."

His face brightened up at this prospect.

"That will be something, Polly?" he said, gaily. "What a view there is from the tops all along that march! You've got the whole of Inverness-shire spread out around you like a map. I think it was £8000 my grandfather got for Corrie-vreak; but I suppose Sir John will want £15,000. I know he is ready to part with it, for it is of little use to him; it does not lie well with his forest. But if we had it back—and with the sheep taken off Allt-nam-ba——"

"Jim says you ought to make Corrie-vreak the sanctuary," his sister remarked; and, indeed, she seemed quite as much interested as he in these joyful forecasts.

"Why, of course. There couldn't be a better——"

"And I was saying that if you planted the Rushen slopes, and built a good large comfortable lodge there, you would get a far better rent for the forest. You know it isn't like the old days, Archie. The people who come from the south now come because it is the fashion; and they must have a fine house for their friends——"

"Yes, and hot luncheons sent up the hill—with champagne glasses and table napkins!" said he. "No more biscuits and a flask to last you from morning till night. The next thing will be a portable dining-table, that can be taken up into one of the corries; and then they will have finger-glasses, I suppose, after lunch. No matter. For there is another thing, my sweet Mrs. Graham, that perhaps you have not considered: it may come to pass that, as time goes on, we may not have to let the forest at all. That would be much better than being indebted to your tenant for a day's stalking in your own forest."

And then it seemed to strike him that all this planning and arranging—on the basis of Yolande's fortune—sounded just a little bit mercenary.

"To hear us talking like this," said he, with a laugh, "any one would imagine that I was marrying in order to improve the Lynn estate. Well, we haven't quite come to that yet, I hope. If it were merely a question of money, I could have gone to America, as I said. That would have been the market for the only kind of goods I've got to sell. No. I don't think any one can bring that against me."

"I, for one, would not think of accusing you of any such thing," said his sister, warmly. "I hope you would have more pride. Jim was poor enough when I married him."

"Now, if I *were* marrying for money," said he—and he seemed eager to rebut this charge—"I would have no scruples at all about asking Yolande to go and live at Lynn. Of course it would be a very economical arrangement. But would I? I should think not. I wouldn't have her shut up there for anything. But I hope she will like the house, as a visitor, and get on well with my father and my aunt. Don't you think she will produce a good impression? What I hope for most of all is that Jack Melville may take a fancy to her. That would settle it in a minute, you know. Whatever Melville approves, that is right—at the Towers, or anywhere else. It's his cheek, you know. He believes in himself; and everybody else believes in him. It isn't only at Gress that he is the dominie. 'He is a scholar and a gentleman'—that is my beloved auntie's pet phrase, as if his going to Oxford on the strength of the Ferguson scholarship made him an authority on the right construction of a salmon-ladder."

"Is that the way you speak of your friends behind their back?"

"Well, he jumps upon me considerable," said he, frankly; "and I may as well take it out of him, when he is at Gress, and I am in Egypt. No matter. If he takes a fancy to Yolande it will be all right. That is how they do with cigars and wines in London—'specially selected and approved by Messrs. So-and-so.' It is a guarantee of genuine quality. And so it will be 'Yolande Winterbourne, approved by Jack Melville of Monaglen and forwarded on to Lynn Towers.'"

"If that is all, that can be easily managed," said his sister, cheerfully. "When she is with us at Inverstroy, we will take her over to call on Mrs. Bell."

"I know what Mrs. Bell will call her—I know the very phrase: she will say, 'She is a bonny doo, that.' The old lady is rather proud of the Scotch she picked up in the south."

"She ought to be prouder of the plunder she picked up farther south still. She 'drew up wi' glaiket Englishers at Carlisle-ha'" to some purpose."

"Yes; and Jack Melville will have every penny of it; and a good solid nest-egg it must be by this time. I am certain the old lady has an eye on Monaglen. What an odd thing it would be if Melville were to have Monaglen handed over to him just as we were getting back Corrievreck! I think there are some curious changes in store in that part of the world."

At this point Mrs. Graham pulled up her sorry steed, and waited until the rest of the cavalcade came along.

"Yolande dear," said she, in a tone of remonstrance, "why don't you come on in front, and get less of the dust?"

Yolande did as she was bid.

"I have been so much interested," said she, brightly. "What a chance it is to learn about Afghanistan and Russia—from one who knows, as Colonel Graham does. You read and read in Parliament; but they all contradict each other. And Colonel Graham is quite of my papa's opinion."

"Well, now, the stupidity of it!" said pretty Mrs. Graham, with an affected petulance. "You people have been talking away about Afghanistan, and Archie and I have been talking away about the Highlands—in the African desert. What is the use of it? We ought to talk about what is around us——"

"I propose," said the Master of Lynn, "that Yolande gives us a lecture on the antiquities of Karnac."

"Do you know, then, that I could?" said she. "But not this Karnac. No; the one in Brittany. I lived near it at Auray for a long time before I was taken to the Château."

"My dear Yolande," exclaimed Mrs. Graham, "if you will tell us about yourself, and your early life, and all that, we will pack off all the mummies and tombs and pillars that ever existed!"

"But there is no story at all, except a sad one," said the girl. "My uncle was a French gentleman—ah, so kind he was!—and one day in the winter he was shot in the woods when he and the other gentlemen were out. Oh, it must have been terrible when they brought him home—not quite dead; but they did not tell me; and perhaps I was too young to experience all the misery. But it killed my aunt, who had taken me away from England when my mother died. She would not see any one; she shut herself up; then one morning

she was found dead ; and then they sent for my father, and he took me to the ladies at the Château. That is all. Perhaps, if I had been older, I should have understood it more, and been more grieved ; but now, when I look back at Auray and our living there, I think mostly of the long drives with my aunt, when my uncle was away at the chase, and often and often we drove along the peninsula of Quiberon, which not every one visits. And was it a challenge, then," she added, in a brighter way, "about a lecture on Carnac? Oh, I can give you one very easily. For I have read all the books about it ; and I can give you all the theories about it, each of which is perfectly self-evident, and all of them quite contradictory. Shall I begin? It was a challenge."

"No, Yolande, I would far rather hear your own theory," said he, gallantly.

"Mine? I have not the vanity," she said, lightly. "But this is what all the writers do not know—that besides the long rows of stones in the open plains—oh, hundreds and thousands, so thick that all the farmhouses and the stone walls have been built of them—besides these, all through the woods, wherever you go, you come upon separate dolmens, sometimes almost covered over. My aunt and I used to stop the carriage, and go wandering through the woods in search ; and always we thought these were the graves of pious people who wished to be buried in a sacred place—near where the priests were sacrificing in the plain—and perhaps that their friends had brought their bodies from some distant land——"

"Just as the Irish Kings were carried to Iona to be buried," said the Master.

"But, Yolande dear," said Mrs. Graham, who was more interested in the story of Yolande's youth than in Celtic monuments, "how did you come to keep up your English, since you have lived all your life in France?"

"But my aunt spoke English, naturally," said she. "Then at the Château one of the ladies also spoke it—oh, I assure you, there was no European language she did not speak. Nor any country she did not know, for she had been travelling companion to a noble lady. And always her belief was that you must learn Latin as the first key."

"Then did you learn Latin, Yolande?" the Master of

Lynn inquired, with some vague impression that the question was jocular, for Yolande had not revealed any traces of erudition.

"If you will examine me in Virgil, I think I shall pass," said she; "but in Horace—not at all! It is distressing the way he twists the meaning about the little short lines, and hides it away; I never had patience enough for him. Ah, there is one who does not hide his meaning—there is one who can write the line that goes straight and sounding and majestic. You have not to puzzle over the meaning when it is Victor Hugo who recounts to you the story of *Ruy Blas*, of *Cromwell*, of *Angelo*, of *Hernani*. That is not the poetry that is made with needles!"

Mrs. Graham was scarcely prepared for this declaration of faith.

"My dear Yolande," said she, cautiously, "Victor Hugo's dramas are very fine; but I would not call them meat for babes. At the Château, now——"

"Oh, they were strictly forbidden," she said, frankly. "Madame would have stormed if she had known. But we read them all the same. Why not? What is the harm? Every one knows that there is crime and wrong in the world; why should one shut one's eyes?—that is folly. Is it not better to be indignant that there should be such crime and wrong? If there is any one who takes harm from such writing, he must be a strange person."

"At all events, Yolande," said he, "I hope you don't think that all kings are scoundrels, and all convicts angels of light? Victor Hugo is all very well, and he thunders along in fine style; but don't you think he comes awfully near being ridiculous? He hasn't much notion of a joke, has he? Don't you think he is rather too portentously solemn?"

Well, this inquiry into Yolande's opinions and experiences—which was intensely interesting to him, and naturally so—was eliciting some odd revelations; for it now appeared that she had arrived at the conclusion that the French, as a nation, were a serious and sombre people.

"Do you not think so?" she said, with wide eyes. "Oh, I have found them so grave. The poor people in the fields, when you speak to them and they answer, it is always

with a sigh ; they look sad and tired ; the care of work lies heavily on them. And at the Château, also, everything was so serious and formal ; and when we paid visits, there was none of the freedom, the amusement, the good humour of the English house. Sometimes, indeed, at Oatlands, at Weybridge, and once or twice in London, when my papa has taken me to visit, I have thought the mamma a little blunt in her frankness—in the expectation you would find yourself at home without any trouble on her part ; but the daughters—oh, they were always very kind, and then so full of interest, about boating, or tennis, or something like that—always so full of spirits, and cheerful—no, it was not in the least like a visit to a French family. In France, how many years is it before you become friends with a neighbour ? In England, if you are among nice people, it is—to-morrow ! You, dear Mrs. Graham, when you came to Oatlands, what did you know about me ? Nothing.”

“ Bless the child, had I not my eyes ? ” Mrs. Graham exclaimed.

“ But before two or three days you were calling me by my Christian name.”

“ Indeed I did,” said Mrs. Graham, “ if it is a Christian name, which I doubt. But this I may suggest to you, my dear Yolande, that you don’t pay me a compliment, after the friendship you speak of, and the relationship we are all hoping for, in calling me by my married name. The name of Polly is not very romantic——”

“ Oh, dear Mrs. Graham, I couldn’t ! ” said Yolande, almost in affright.

“ Of course not,” said the pretty young matron, with one of her most charming smiles. “ Of course you couldn’t be guilty of such familiarity with one of my advanced age. But I suppose Jim is right. I am getting old. Only he doesn’t seem to consider that a reason for treating me with any increasing respect.”

“ I am sure I never thought of such a thing ! ” Yolande protested, almost in a voice of entreaty. “ How could you imagine it ! ”

“ Very well. But if you consider that ‘ Polly ’ is not in accordance with my age, or my serious character as a mother

and a wife, there is a compromise in 'Mary,' which, indeed, was my proper name until I fell into the hands of men. I used always to be called Mary, until Archie and Jim began with their impertinence. And when we are in the Highlands together, you know, and you are staying with us at Inverstroy, or we are visiting you at Allt-nam-ba, or when we are all together at the Towers, whatever would the people think if they heard you call me 'Mrs. Graham'? They would think we had quarrelled."

"Then you are to be my sister Mary!" said Yolande, placidly; but the Master of Lynn flushed with pleasure when he heard that phrase.

"And I will be your champion and protectress when you come into our savage wilds in a way you can't dream of," continued pretty Mrs. Graham. "You don't know how we stand by each other in the Highlands. We stand up for our own; and you will be one of us in good time. And you haven't the least idea what a desperate person I am when my temper is up—though Jim would tell you he knows. Well, now, I suppose that is the convent over there, behind those palms; and we have been chattering the whole way about the Highlands, and Victor Hugo, and I don't know what; and I haven't the least idea what we are going to see or what we have to do."

But here the dragoman came up to assume the leadership of the party; and the Master of Lynn allowed himself to be eclipsed. He was not sorry. He was interested far less in the things around him than in the glimpses he had just got of Yolande's earlier years; and he was trying to place these one after another, to make a connected picture of her life up till the time that this journey brought him and her together. Could anything be more preoccupying than this study of the companion who was to be with him through all the long future time? And already she was related to him; she had chosen his sister to be hers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PHRASE.

BUT these idle wanderings of theirs in Upper Egypt were destined to come to a sudden end. One evening they were coming down the river, and were about to pass Merhadj, when they saw young Ismat Effendi putting off in another boat, evidently with the intention of intercepting them. They immediately ordered their boat to be pulled in to the shore; and as Ismat said he wanted to say something to them, they stepped on board his father's dahabeeah, and went into the saloon, for the sake of coolness.

Then the bright-faced young Egyptian, who seemed at once excited and embarrassed, told them, in his fluent and oddly-phrased English, that he was much alarmed; and that his alarm was not on account of any danger that might happen to them, but was the fear that they might think him discourteous and inhospitable.

"Who could think that!" said pretty Mrs. Graham, in her sweetest way.

"Of course not. What's the matter?" said her husband, more bluntly.

Then young Ismat proceeded to explain that the latest news from the capital was not satisfactory; that many Europeans were leaving the country: that the reports in the journals were very contradictory; and that, in short, no one seemed to know what might not happen. And then he went on to implore them, if he suggested that they ought to return to Cairo, and satisfy themselves of their safety, by going to the English Consulate there, not to imagine that he wished them to shorten their visit, or that his father desired to dispossess them of the dahabeeah. "How could that be," he said, quite anxiously, "when here was another dahabeeah lying idle? No; the other dahabeeah was wholly at their service, for as long as they chose; and it would be a great honour to his father, and the highest happiness to himself, if they were to remain at Merhadj for the longest period they could command; but was he not bound, especially when there were two

ladies with them, to let them know what he had heard, and give them counsel?"

"My dear fellow, we understand perfectly," said Colonel Graham, with his accustomed good humour. "And much obliged for the hint. Fact is, I think we ought to get back to Cairo in any case; for these women-folk want to have a turn at the bazaars, and by the time they have half-ruined us we shall just be able to get along to Suez, to catch the *Ganges*——"

"We must have plenty of time in Cairo," said Mrs. Graham emphatically.

"Oh yes," said he. "Never mind the danger. Let them buy silver necklaces, and they won't heed anything else. Very well, Mr. Ismat, come along with us now and have some dinner, and we can talk things over. We shall just be in time."

"May I?" said the young Egyptian to Mrs. Graham. "I am not intruding?"

"We shall be delighted if you will come with us," said she, with one of her most gracious smiles.

"It will not be pleasant for me when you go," said he. "There is not much society here."

"Nor will you find much society when you come to see us at Inverstroy, Mr. Ismat," she answered. "But we will make up for that by giving you a true Highland welcome: shall we not, Yolande dear?"

Yolande was not in the least embarrassed. She had quite grown accustomed to consider the Highlands as her future home.

"I hope so," she said, simply. "We are not likely to forget the kindness Mr. Ismat has shown to us."

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" said he.

Now this resolve to go back to Cairo, and to get along from thence in time to catch the P. and O. steamer *Ganges* at Suez, was hailed with satisfaction by each member of the little party, though for very different reasons. Mr. Winterbourne was anxious to be at St. Stephens' before the Budget; and he could look forward to giving uninterrupted attention to his Parliamentary duties, for Yolande was going on to Inverstroy with the Grahams. Yolande herself was glad to think that

soon she would be installed as house-mistress at Allt-nam-ba ; she had all her lists ready for the shops at Inverness ; and she wanted time to have the servants tested before her father's arrival. Mrs. Graham, of course, lived in the one blissful hope of seeing Baby again ; while her husband was beginning to think that a little salmon-fishing would be an excellent thing. But the reason the Master of Lynn had for welcoming this decision was much more occult.

"Polly," he had said to his sister on the previous day, "do you know, your friend Miss Yolande——"

"My friend !" she said, staring at him.

"She seems more intimate with you than with any one else, at all events," said he. "Well, I was going to say that she takes things pretty coolly."

"I don't understand you."

"I say she takes things very coolly," he repeated. "No one would imagine she was engaged at all."

"Are you complaining of her, already?"

"I am not complaining. I am stating a fact."

"What is wrong, then? Do you want her to go about proclaiming her engagement? Why, she can't. You haven't given her an engagement-ring yet. Give her her engagement-ring first, and then she can go about and show it."

"Oh, you know very well what I mean. You know that no one cares less about sentimentality and that sort of thing than I do ; I don't believe in it much ; but still—she is just a trifle too business-like. She seems to say 'Did I promise to marry? Oh, very well ; all right, when the time comes. Call again to-morrow.' Of course my idea would not be to have a languishing love-sick maiden always lolloping at your elbow ; but her absolute carelessness and indifference——"

"Oh, Archie, how can you say such a thing ! She is most friendly with you ——"

"Friendly ! Yes ; so she is with Graham. Is it the way they bring up girls in France?—to have precisely the same amount of friendliness for everybody—lovers, husbands, or even other people's husbands. It is convenient, certainly ; but things might get mixed."

"I wonder to hear you," said Mrs. Graham, indignantly. "You don't deserve your good fortune. The fact is, Yolande

Winterbourne happens to have very good health and spirits, and she is naturally light-hearted ; whereas, you would like to have her sombre and mysterious, I suppose ; or perhaps it is the excitement of lovers' quarrels that you want. Is that it ? Do you want to be quarrelling and making up again all day long ? Well, to tell you the truth, Archie, you haven't hit on the right sort of girl. Now, *Shena Vân* would have suited you ; she has a temper that would have given you amusement."

"Leave Miss Stewart alone !" he said, roughly. "I wish there were many women in the world like her : if there are, I haven't met them."

"Yolande is too good for you."

"So she seems to think, at all events."

"Why don't you go and quarrel with her, then ? What is the use of coming and talking over the matter with me ?"

"With her ? It wouldn't interest her. She would rather talk about the price of coals, or the chances of the Irish getting Home Rule—anything but what ought to be the most important event in her life."

"Archie," said his sister, who did not attach too much seriousness to these temporary moods of disappointment, "if papa finds out that Mr. Winterbourne is half inclined, and more than half inclined, to favour Home Rule, he will go out of his senses."

"Let him go out of his senses," said her brother, with deliberate indifference. "I suppose the worst that could happen would be the breaking off of the match."

But this possibility, involving the destruction of all her beautiful plans and dreams of the future, instantly awoke her alarm ; and her protest was emphatic.

"Archie," said she, regarding him sternly, "I beg you to remember that you are expected to act as a gentleman."

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"I will tell you, plain enough. You have asked this girl to be your wife ; she has accepted you ; your engagement has been made known ; and I say this, that if you were to throw her over—I don't care for what reason—you would stamp yourself as a coward. Is that plain ? A girl may be allowed to change her mind—at least, she sometimes does ; and there is not much said against her ; but the man who engages him-

self to a girl, and allows the engagement to be known and talked about, and then throws her over, I say is a coward, neither more nor less. And I don't believe it of you. I don't believe you would allow papa or any one else to interfere, now the thing is settled. The Leslies are not made of stuff like that."

"That is all very well"—he was going to urge; but the impetuous little woman would have her say.

"What is more, I honour her highly for her reserve. There is nothing more disgusting than to see young people dawdling and fondling in the presence of others. You don't want to be Jock and Jenny going to the fair, do you?"

"Look here, Demosthenes," he said, calmly. "You are as good as any one I know at drawing a herring across the scent; but you are perfectly aware all the time of what I mean."

This somewhat disconcerted her.

"Well, I am—in a way," she said; and her tone was now rather one of appeal. "But don't you see what life on board this boat is; It is all in the open. You cannot expect any girl to be confidential when you have scarcely ever a chance of talking to her by herself. You must make allowances, Archie. I do know what you mean; but—but I don't think you are right; and I, for one, am very glad to see her so light-hearted. You may depend on it, she hasn't sacrificed any one else in order to accept you. Her cheerfulness promises very well for the future—that is my idea of it; it shows that she is not thinking of somebody else, as girls sometimes do, even after they are engaged. Of course it isn't the girl's place to declare her sentiments; and it does happen sometimes that there is some one they would rather have had speak; and, of course, there is an occasional backward glance, even after marriage. In Yolande's case, I don't think there is. One cannot be certain; but I don't think there is. And why should you be disappointed because she does not too openly show her preference? Of course she can't—in this sort of life. But you will have the whole field to yourself. You have no rival; and she has a quickly grateful nature. You will have her all to yourself in the Highlands. Here she is waiting on her father half the time, and the other half Jim is making fun with her. At Inverstroy it will be quite different."

"Well, perhaps. I hope so," said he.

"Of course it will! You will have her all to yourself. Jim will be away at his fences and his pheasant-coops; and I shall have plenty to do in the house. And if you want her to quarrel with you, I daresay she will oblige you. Most girls can manage that. But the first thing to be done, Archie—in sober seriousness—is to buy a very nice engagement-ring for her at Cairo; and that will be always reminding her. And I do hope it will be a nice one, a very handsome one indeed. You ought not to consider expense on such an occasion. If you haven't quite enough money with you, Jim will lend you some. It is certainly odd that she should have no family jewellery; but it is all the greater opportunity for you to give her something very pretty; and you ought to show the Winterbournes, for your own sake, and for the sake of our family, that you can do the thing handsomely."

He laughed.

"To hear you, Polly, one would think you were an old woman—a thorough old schemer. And yet how long is it since your chief delight in life used to be to go tomabogging down the face of Bendyerg?"

"I have learnt a little common sense since then," said pretty Mrs. Graham, with a demure smile.

Well, he did buy a very handsome ring for her when they got to Cairo; and Yolande was greatly pleased with it, and said something very kind and pretty to him. Moreover, there was a good deal of buying going on. The gentlemen at the Consulate had expressed the belief that they were in no immediate danger of having their throats cut; and they set to work to ransack the bazaars with a right good will. Nor was there any concealment of the intent of most of those purchases. Of course they bought trinkets and bric-à-brac, mostly for presentation to their friends; and Mr. Winterbourne insisted on Mrs. Graham accepting from him a costly piece of Syrian embroidery on which she had set longing eyes during their previous visit. But the great mass of their purchases—at least of Mr. Winterbourne's purchases—was clearly and obviously meant for the decoration of Yolande's future home. Under Mrs. Graham's guidance, he bought all sorts of silk stuffs, embroideries, and draperies. He had a

huge case packed with hand-graven brass-work—squat, quaint candlesticks, large shields, cups, trays, and what not; and once, when, in an old curiosity shop, and Yolande happening to be standing outside, Mrs. Graham ventured to remonstrate with him about the cost of some Rhodian dishes he had just said he would take, he answered her thus—

“My dear Mrs. Graham, when in Egypt we must do as the Egyptians do. Don’t you remember the bride who came down to the river, bringing with her her bales of carpets and her drove of donkeys? Yolande must have her plenishing—that is a good Scotch word, is it not?”

“But I should think she must have about a dozen of those sheikhs’ head-dresses already,” said pretty Mrs. Graham. “And we don’t really have so many fancy-dress balls in Inverness. Besides, she could not go as a sheikh.”

“Fancy-dress balls? Oh no; nothing of the kind. They will do for a dozen things in a room—to be pitched on to sofas—or on the backs of chairs—merely patches of fine colour.”

“And that,” said she, with a smile, looking at an antique Persian dagger, with an exquisitely carved handle and elaborately inlaid sheath,—“of what use will that be in the Highlands?”

“My dear madam,” said he, with a perfectly grave face, “I have not listened to your husband and your brother for nothing. Is it not necessary to have something with which to gralloch a wounded stag?”

“To gralloch a stag with a beautiful thing like that!” she exclaimed in horror.

“And if it is too good for that, cannot Yolande use it as a paper-knife? You don’t mean to say that when you and your husband came home from India, you brought back no curiosities with you?”

“Of course we did; and long before that Jim had a whole lot of things from the Summer Palace at Pekin; but then, we are old people. These things are too expensive for young people just beginning.”

“The bride must have her plenishing,” said he, briefly; and then he began to bargain for a number of exceedingly beautiful Damascus tiles, which, he thought, would just about be sufficient for the construction of a fireplace.

Nor were these people the least bit ashamed when, some days after this, they managed to smuggle their valuable cases on board the homeward-bound steamer, without paying the Customs' dues. Mr. Winterbourne declared that a nation which was so financially mad as to levy an 8 per cent *ad valorem* duty on exports—or rather that a nation which was so mad as to tax exports at all—ought not to be encouraged in its lunacy; and he further consoled his conscience by reflecting that, so far from his party having spoiled the Egyptians, it was doubtless all the other way; and that probably some £60 or £70 of English money had been left in the Cairene bazaars which had no right to be there. However, he was content. The things were such things as he had wanted; he had got them as cheaply as seemed possible; he would have paid more for them had it been necessary. For, he said to himself, even the rooms of a Highland shooting-box might be made more picturesque and interesting by these art-relics of other and former civilisations. He did not know what kind of home the Master of Lynn was likely to provide for his bride; but good colours and good materials were appropriate anywhere; and even if Yolande and her husband were to succeed to the possession of Lynn Towers, and even if the rooms there (as he had heard was the case at Balmoral) were decorated exclusively in Highland fashion, surely they could set aside some chamber for the reception of those draperies, and potteries, and tiles, and what not, that would remind Yolande of her visit to the East. The bride must have her plenishing, he said to himself again and again. But they bought no jewellery, of a good kind, in Cairo; Mr. Winterbourne said he would rather trust Bond Street wares.

And at last the big steamer slowly sailed away from the land; and they had begun their homeward voyage. Mrs. Graham and her husband were on the hurricane-deck; she was leaning with both arms on the rail.

“Good-bye, Egypt,” said she, as she regarded the pale yellow country under the pale turquoise sky. “You have been very kind to me. You have made me a most charming present to take back with me to the Highlands.”

“What, then?” said her husband.

"A sister."

"She isn't your sister yet," he said, gruffly.

"She is; and she will be," she answered, confidently. "Do you know, Jim, I had my hopes and wishes all the way out; but I could never be sure; for Archie is not easily caught. And I don't think she distinguished him much from the others on the voyage here; except in so far as he was one of our party. Sometimes I gave it up, to tell you the truth. And then again it seemed so desirable in every way; for I had got to like the girl myself; and I could see that Archie would be safe with her; and I could see very well, too, that Mr. Winterbourne had his eyes open, and that he seemed very well disposed towards it."

"You must have been watching everybody like a cat," her husband said, in not too complimentary fashion.

"Can you wonder that I was interested?" she said, in protest. "Just fancy what it would be for us if he had brought some horrid insufferable creature to Lynn! I wouldn't have gone near the place; and we have little enough society as it is. But that life on the Nile did it; and I knew it would, the moment the dahabeeah had started away from Asyoot—being all by ourselves like that, and he paying her little attentions all day long. He couldn't help doing that, could he?—it wouldn't have been civil. And I foresaw what the end would be; and I am very glad of it; and quite grateful to Egypt and the Nile, despite all the flies and the mosquitoes."

"I daresay it will turn out all right," her husband said, indifferently.

"Well, you don't seem very delighted," she exclaimed. "Is that all you have to say? Don't you think it is a very good thing?"

"Well, yes, I do think it is a good thing. I have no doubt they will get on very well together. And in other respects the match will be an advantageous one."

"That is rather cold approval," said she, somewhat disappointed.

"Oh no, it isn't," said he, and he turned from looking at the retreating land and regarded her. "I say I don't think he could have chosen better; and I believe they will be happy enough; and they ought to be comfortable and

well off. Isn't that sufficient? He seems fond of her; I think they will lead a very comfortable life. What more?"

"But there is something behind what you say, Jim; I know there is," she said.

"And if there is, it is nothing very serious," said he; and then he added with a curious sort of smile: "I tell you I think it will come out all right; I am sure it will. But you can't deny this, Polly—well, I don't know how to put it. I may be mistaken. I haven't as sharp eyes as yours. But I have a fancy that this marriage, though I have no doubt it will be a happy enough one, will be, on her side at least——"

"What then?" said his wife, peremptorily.

"I don't quite know whether the French have a phrase for it," said he, evasively, but still with the same odd smile on his face. "Probably they have; they ought to have, at least. At any rate, I have a kind of fancy—now its nothing very terrible—I say I have a dim kind of fancy that on her side the marriage will be something that might be called a *mariage de complaisance*. Oh, you needn't go away in a temper. There have been worse marriages than a *mariage de complaisance*."


CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG THE CLOUDS.

FAR up in the wild and lonely hills that form the backbone, as it were, of eastern Inverness-shire, in the desert solitudes where the Findhorn and the Foyers first begin to draw their waters from a thousand mystic-named or nameless rills, stands the lodge of Allt-nam-ba. The plain little double-gabled building, with its dependencies of kennels, stables, coach-house, and keepers' bothy, occupies a promontory formed by the confluence of two brawling streams; and faces a long, wide, beautiful valley, which terminates in the winding waters of a loch. It is the only sign of habitation in the strangely silent district; and it is the last. The rough hill-road leading to it terminates there. From that small plateau, divergent corries—softly wooded most of them are, with waterfalls half hidden by birch

and rowan trees—stretch up still farther into a sterile wilderness of moor and lochan and bare mountain-top, the haunt of the ptarmigan, the red deer, and the eagle ; and the only sound to be heard in these voiceless altitudes is the monotonous murmur of the various burns—the White Winding Water, the Dun Water, the Stream of the Red Lochan, the Stream of the Fairies, the Stream of the Corrie of the Horses, as they are called in the Gaelic.

At the door of this solitary little lodge, on a morning towards the end of July, Yolande Winterbourne was standing, engaged in buttoning on her driving gloves, but occasionally glancing out at the bewildering, changeful, flashing, and gleaming day around her. For, indeed, since she had come to live at Allt-nam-ba she had acquired the conviction that the place seemed very close up to the sky ; and that this broad valley, walled in by those great and silent hills, formed a sort of caldron, in which the elements were in the habit of mixing up weather for transference to the wide world beyond. At this very moment, for example, a continual phantasmagoria of cloud-effects was passing before her eyes. Far mountain-tops grew blacker and blacker in shadow ; then the gray mist of the rain stole slowly across and hid them from view ; then they reappeared again, and a sudden shaft of sunlight would strike on the yellow-green slopes and on the boulders of wet and glittering granite. But she had this one consolation—that the prospect in front of the lodge was much more reassuring than that behind. Behind—over the mountainous ranges of the moor—the clouds were banking up in a heavy and thunderous purple ; and in the ominous silence the streams coming down from the corries sounded loud ; whereas, away before her, the valley that led down to the haunts of men was for the most part flooded with brilliant sunlight, and the wind-swept loch was of the darkest and keenest blue. Altogether there was more life and motion here—more colour and brilliancy and change—than in the pale and placid Egyptian landscape she had grown accustomed to ; but there was also—she might have been pardoned for thinking—for one who was about to drive fourteen miles in a dog-cart, a little more anxiety ; and she had already resolved to take her waterproof with her.



However, she was not much dismayed. She had lived in this weather-brewing caldron of a place for some little time ; and had grown familiar with its threatening glooms, which generally came to nothing ; and with its sudden and dazzling glories, which laughed out a welcome to the lonely traveller in the most surprising fashion. When the dog-cart—a four-wheeled vehicle—was brought round, she stepped into it lightly, and took the reins as if to the manner born, though she had never handled a whip until Mrs. Graham had put her in training at Inverstroy. Then there was a strict charge to Jane to see that brisk fires were kept burning in all the rooms ; for, although it was still July, the air of these alpine solitudes was sometimes somewhat keen. And then—the youthful and fair-haired Sandy having got up behind—she released the break ; and presently they were making their way, slowly and cautiously at first, down the stony path, and over the loud-sounding wooden bridge that here spans the roaring red-brown waters of the Allt-cam-bân.

But when once they were over the bridge and into the road leading down the wide strath, they quickly mended their pace. There was an unusual eagerness and brightness in her look. Sandy the groom knew that the stout and serviceable cob in the shafts was a sure-footed beast ; but the road was of the roughest ; and he could not understand how the young English lady, who was generally very cautious, should drive so fast. Was it to get away from the black thunder-masses of cloud that lay over the mountains behind them ? Here, at least, there seemed no danger of any storm. The sunlight was brilliant on the wide green pastures and on the flashing waters of the stream ; and the steep and sterile hillsides were shining now ; and the loch far ahead of them had its wind-rippled surface of a blue like the heart of a sapphire. Yolande's face soon showed the influence of the warm sunlight and of the fresh keen air ; and her eyes were glad, though they seemed busy with other things. Indeed, there was scarcely any sign of life around to attract her attention. The sheep on the vast slopes, where there was but a scanty pasturage among the blocks of granite, were as small gray specks ; an eagle, slowly circling on motionless wing over the farthest mountain range, looked no bigger than a hawk ; some young falcons, whose cry

sounded just overhead among the crags, were invisible. But perhaps she did not heed these things much? She seemed preoccupied, and yet happy and light-hearted.

When, in due course of time, they reached the end of the valley and got on to the road that wound along the wooded shores of the loch, there was much easier going; and Sandy dismissed his fears. It was a pretty loch, this stretch of wind-stirred blue water, for the hills surrounding it were somewhat less sterile than those at Allt-nam-ba; here and there the banks were fringed with hazel, and at the lower end of it, where the river flowing from it wound through a picturesque ravine, were the dark green plantations surrounding Lynn Towers. They had driven for about a mile and a half or so by the shores of the lake, when Yolande fancied she heard some clanking noise proceeding from the other side; and thereupon she instantly asked Sandy what that could be, for any sound save the bleating of sheep or the croak of a raven was an unusual thing here. The young Highland lad strained his eyes in the direction of the distant hillside; and at last he said—

“Oh yes, I see them now. They will be the men taking up more fencing to the forest. Duncan was speaking about that, madam.”

(For he was a polite youth, as far as his English went.)

“I can’t see anything, Sandy,” said the young lady.

“If Miss Winterbourne would be looking about half-way up the hill—they are by the side of the gray corrie now.”

Then he added, after a second—

“I am thinking that will be the Master at the top.”

“Do you mean the Master of Lynn?” she said, quickly.

“Yes, madam.”

“Well, your eyes are sharper than mine, Sandy. I can see that black speck on the sky-line, but that is all.”

“He is waving a handkerchief now,” said Sandy, with much coolness.

“Oh, that is impossible. How could he make us out at this distance?”

“The Master will know there is no other carriage than this one coming from Allt-nam-ba.”

“Very well, then,” said she, taking out her handkerchief and giving it a little shake or two in the sunlight. “I will

take the chance ; but you know, Sandy, it is more likely to be one of the keepers waving his hand to you."

"Oh no, madam, it is the Master himself—I am sure of it. He was up at the bothy yesterday evening, to see Duncan about the gillies ; and he was saying something about the new fence above the loch."

"Was Mr. Leslie at Allt-nam-ba last night?" said she, in surprise.

"Oh yes, madam."

"And he left no message for me?"

"I think there was not any message. But he was asking when Miss Winterbourne's father was coming ; and I told him that I was to drive Miss Winterbourne into Foyers this morning."

"Oh, that is all right," she said, with much content.

By this time they had reached the lower end of the lake ; and, when they had crossed the wooden bridge over the river and ascended a bit of a hill, they found themselves opposite Lynn Towers—a large modern building, which, with its numerous conservatories, stood on a level piece of ground on the other side of the ravine. Then on again, and in time they beheld stretching out before them a wide and variegated plain, looking rich and fertile and cultivated after the mountainous solitudes they had left behind ; while all around them were hanging woods, with open slopes of pasture, and rills running down to the river in the valley beneath. As they drove on and down into that smiling and shining country, the day grew more and more brilliant. The breaks of blue in the sky grew broader ; the silver-gleaming clouds went slowly by to the east ; and the air, which was much warmer down here, was perfumed with the delicate resinous odour of the sweet-gale. Wild flowers grew more luxuriantly. Here and there a farm-house appeared, with fields of grain encroaching on the moorland. And at last, after some miles of this gradual descent, Yolande arrived at a little sprinkling of houses sufficient in number—though much scattered among the fields—to be called a village ; and drew up at the small wooden gate of a modest little mansion, very prettily situated in the midst of a garden of roses, columbine, nasturtiums, and other cottage favourites.

No sooner had the carriage stopped than instantly the door

was opened by a smiling and comely dame, with silver-gray hair and pleasant, shrewd, gray eyes, who came down the garden path. She was neatly and plainly dressed, in a house-keeper-looking kind of costume, but her face was refined and intelligent; and there was a sort of motherliness, as well as very obvious kindness, in the look with which she regarded the young English lady.

"Do you know that I meant to scold you, Mrs. Bell, for robbing your garden again?" said Yolande. "But this time—no—I am not going to scold you, I can only thank you, for my papa is coming to-day; and oh, you should see how pretty the rooms are with the flowers you sent me. But not again, now—not any more destroying the garden——"

"Dear me, and is your papa coming the day?" said the elderly woman, in a slow, persuasive, gentle, south-country sort of fashion.

"I am going now to meet him at the steamer," said Yolande, quickly. "That is why——"

"Well now," said Mrs. Bell, "that is just a most extraordinary piece of good luck; for I happen to have a pair of the very finest and plumpest young ducklings that ever I set eyes on——"

"No, no; no, no, no!" Yolande cried, laughing. "I cannot have any more excuses for these kindnesses and kindnesses. Every day since I came here—every day a fresh excuse—and always the boy coming with Mrs. Bell's compliments——"

"Dinna ye think I know perfectly well," said the other, in a tone of half-indignant remonstrance, "what it is for a young leddy to be trying housekeeping in a place like yon? So there's not to be another word about it; ye'll jist stop for a minute as ye're going back, and take the ducklings wi' ye; ay, and I've got a nice bunch or two o' fresh-cut lettuce for ye, and a few carrots and turnips—I declare it's a shame to see the things wasting in the gairden, for we canna use the half of them——"

"Wouldn't it be simpler for you to give me the garden and the house and everything all at once?" said Yolande. "Well, now, I wish to see Mr. Melville."

"Ye canna do that," was the prompt reply.

"Why?" said the girl, with something of a stare; for she had not been in the habit of having her requests refused up in this part of the world.

"He is at his work," said the elderly dame, glancing at a small building that stood at right angles with the house. "Do ye think I would disturb him when he is at his work? Do ye think I want him to send me about my business?"

"There is a tyrant!" exclaimed Yolande. "Never mind, then; I wanted to thank him for sending me the trout. Now I will not. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Bell; I will take the vegetables, and be very grateful to you; but not the ducklings——"

"Ye'll just take the ducklings, as I say, like a sensible young leddy," said Mrs. Bell, with emphasis, "and there is not to be another word about it."

So on she drove again, on this bright and beautiful July day, through a picturesque and rocky and rugged country, until in time she reached the end of her journey—the charming little hotel that is perched high amid the woods overlooking Loch Ness, within sound of the thundering Foyers Water. And as she had hurried mainly to give the cob a long mid-day rest—the steamer not being due till the afternoon,—she now found herself with some hours' leisure at her disposal, which she spent in idly wandering through the umbrageous woods, startling many a half-tame pheasant, but never coming on the real object of her quest, a roe-deer. And then, at last, she heard the throbbing of paddle wheels in the intense silence; and, just about as quick as any roe-deer, she made her way down through the bracken and the bushes, and went right out to the end of the little pier.

She made him out at once, even at that distance; for though he was not a tall man, his sharp-featured, sun-reddened face and silver-white hair made him easily recognisable. And of course she was greatly delighted when he came ashore, and excited too; and she herself would have carried gun-cases, fishing-baskets, and what not, to the dog-cart, had not the boots from the hotel interfered. And she had a hundred eager questions and assurances, but would pay no heed to his remonstrance about the risks of her driving.

"Why, papa, I drove every day at Inverstroy!" she exclaimed, as they briskly set out for Allt-nam-ba.

"I suppose the Grahams were very kind to you?" he said.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!"

"And the Master, how is he?"

"Oh, very well, I believe. Of course I have not seen him since Mrs. Graham left. But he has made all the arrangements for you—ponies, panniers, everything quite arranged. And he left the rifle at the bothy, and I have the cartridges all right from Inverness—oh yes, you will find everything prepared; and there is no want of provision, for Mr. Melville sends me plenty of trout, and Duncan goes up the hill now and again for a hare, and they are sending me a sheep from the farm——"

"A sheep!"

"Duncan said it was the best way, to have a sheep killed. And we have new-laid eggs and fresh milk every day. And every one is so kind and attentive, papa, that whatever turns out wrong that will be my fault in not arranging properly——"

"Oh, that will be all right," said he, good-humouredly. "I want to hear about yourself, Yolande. What do you think of Lord Lynn and his sister, now that you have seen something more of them?"

This question checked her volubility, and for a second a very odd expression came over her face.

"They are very serious people, papa," said she, with some caution; "and—and very pious, I think."

"But I suppose you are as pious as they can be?" her father said. "That is no objection."

She was silent.

"And those other people—the old woman who pretends to be a housekeeper and is a sort of good fairy in disguise, and the penniless young laird who has no land——"

Instantly her face brightened up.

"Oh, he is the most extraordinary person, papa—a magician! I cannot describe it; you must see for yourself; but really it is wonderful. He has a stream to work for him—yes—for Mrs. Graham and I went and visited it—climbing away up the hills—and there was the water-wheel at work in the water, and a hut close by, and there were copper wires to take the electricity away down to the house, where he has a store of it. It is a genie for him; he makes it light the lamps in

the house, in the schoolroom, and it makes electrotype copies for him ; it works a lath for turning wood—oh, I can't tell you all about it. And he has been so kind to me ; but mostly in secret, so that I could not catch him to thank him. How could I know ? I complain to Mrs. Bell that it is a trouble to send to Inverness for some one to set the clock going ; the next morning—it is all right. It goes ; nothing wrong at all ! Then the broken window in the drawing-room ; Mrs. Graham and I drive away to Fort Augustus : when I come back in the evening there is a new pane put in. Then the filter in the water-tank up the hill——”

“ But what on earth is this wonderful Jack-of-all-trades doing here ? Why, you yourself wrote to me, Yolande, that he had taken the Snell Exhibition and the Ferguson Scholarship, and blazed like a comet through Balliol ; and now I find him tinkering at window-panes——”

She laughed.

“ I think he works very hard ; he says he is very lazy. He is very fond of fishing ; he is not well off ; and here he is permitted to fish in the lakes far away among the hills that few people will take the trouble to go to. Then naturally he has much interest in this neighbourhood, where once his people were the great family ; and those living here have a great respect for him ; and he has built a school and teaches in it—it is a free school, no charge at all,” Yolande added hastily. “ That is Mrs. Bell's kindness, the building of the school. Then he makes experiments and discoveries : is it not enough of an occupation when every one is talking about the electric light ? Also he is a great botanist ; and when it is not school time, he is away up in the hills, after rare plants, or to fish. Oh, it is terrible the loneliness of the small lakes up in the hills, Mr. Leslie has told me ; no road, no track, no life anywhere. And the long hours of climbing : oh, I am sure I have been sorry sometimes—many times—when day after day I receive a present of trout and a message, to think of the long climbing and the labour——”

“ But why doesn't he fish in the loch at Allt-nam-ba ? ” her father exclaimed. “ That can't be so difficult to get at.”

“ He had permission last year,” said she.

“ Why not this ? ”

"He thought it would be more correct to wait for you to give permission."

"Well, now, Yolande," said he, peevishly, "how could you be so stupid! Here is a fellow who shows you all sorts of kindnesses, and you haven't enough common sense to offer him a day's fishing in the loch!"

"It was not my affair," she said, cheerfully. "That was for you to arrange."

"Waiting for permission to fish in a loch like that!" her father said, more good-naturedly—for indeed his discontent with Yolande rarely lasted for more than about the fifteenth part of a second. "Leslie told me the loch would be infinitely improved if five-sixths of the fish were netted out of it; the trout would run to a better size. However, Miss Yolande, since you've treated him badly, you must make amends. You must ask him to dinner."

"Oh yes, papa; I shall be glad to do that," she said, blithely.

"If the house is anywhere near the road, we can pick him up as we go along. Then I suppose you could send a message to the Master; he is not likely to have an engagement."

"But you don't mean for to-night!" she said, in amazement.

"I do, indeed. Why not?"

"What! The first night that we have to ourselves together, to think of inviting strangers?"

"Strangers?" he repeated. "That is an odd phrase to be used by a young lady who wears an engaged ring."

"But I am not married yet, papa," said she, flushing slightly. "I am only engaged. When I am a wife, it may be different; but at present I am your daughter."

"And you would rather that we had this first evening all by ourselves?"

"It is not a wish, papa," said she, coolly. "It is a downright certainty. There is only dinner for two; and there will be only dinner for two; and these two are you and I. Do you forget that I am mistress of the house?"

Well, he seemed nothing loth; the prospect did not at all overcloud his face—as they drove away through this smiling and cheerful and picturesque country, with the severer altitudes beyond gradually coming into view.

That same night Yolande and her father set out for an arm-in-arm stroll away down the broad silent valley. It was late ; but still there was a bewilderment of light all around them ; for in the north-western heavens the wan twilight still lingered ; while behind them, in the south-east, the moon had arisen, and now projected their shadows before them as they walked. Yolande was talkative and joyous—the silence and the loneliness of the place did not seem to oppress her ; and he was always a contented listener. They walked away along the strath, under the vast solitudes of the hills, and by the side of this winding and murmuring stream ; and in time they reached the loch. For a wonder it was perfectly still. The surface was like glass ; and those portions that were in shadow were black as jet. But these were not many, for the moonlight was shining adown this wide space, touching softly the overhanging crags and the woods, and showing them—as they got on still farther—above the loch and the bridge and the river, and standing silent amid the silent plantations, the pale white walls of Lynn.

“And so you think, Yolande,” said he, “that you will be quite happy in living in this solitary place?”

“If you were always to be away—oh no ; but with you coming to see me sometimes, as now, oh yes, yes—why not?” said she, cheerfully.

“You wouldn’t mind being cut off from the rest of the world?” he said.

“I?” she said. “What is it to me? I know so few people elsewhere.”

“It would be a peaceful life, Yolande,” said he, thoughtfully. “Would it not?”

“Oh yes,” she answered, brightly. “And then, papa, you would take Allt-nam-ba for the whole year, every year, and not merely have a few weeks’ shooting in the autumn. Why should it not be a pleasant place to live in? Could anything be more beautiful than to-night—and the solitude? And one or two of the people are so kind. But this I must tell you, papa, that the one who has been kindest to me here is not Lord Lynn, nor his sister, Mrs. Colquhoun, nor any one of them, but Mrs. Bell ; and the first chance, when she is sure not to meet Mr. Melville, or Mr. Leslie—for she is very particular about

that, and pretends only to be a housekeeper—I am going to bring her up to Allt-nam-ba ; and you will see how charming she is, and how good and wise and gentle, and how proud she is of Mr. Melville. As for him, he laughs at her. He laughs at every one. He has no respect for any one more than another ; he talks to Lord Lynn as he talks to Duncan—perhaps with more kindness to Duncan. Rich or poor, it is no difference—no, he does not seem to understand that there is a difference. And all the people, the shepherds, the gillies, and Mrs. Macdougall at the farm—every one thinks there is no one like him. Perhaps I have learnt a little from him, even in so short a time?—it may be. I do not care that Mrs. Bell has been a cook ; that is nothing to me ; I see that she is a good woman, and clever, and kind ; and I will be her friend if she pleases ; and I know that he gives her more honour than to any one else, though he does not say much. No, he is too sarcastic ; and not very courteous. Sometimes he is almost rude ; but he is a little more considerate with old people ——”

“Look here, Yolande,” her father said, with a laugh, “all this afternoon, and all this evening, and all down this valley, you have done nothing but talk about this wonderful Mr. Melville—although you say you have scarcely ever seen him ——”

“No, no, no, papa ! I said, when he had done any kindness to me, he had kept out of the way, and I had no chance to thank him.”

“Very well, all your talking has produced nothing but a jumble. I want to see this laird without land, this Balliol clockmaker, this fisherman schoolmaster, this idol who is worshipped by the natives. Let me see what he is like, first of all. Ask him to dinner—and the Master too. We have few neighbours, and we must make the most of them. So now let us get back home again, child ; though it is almost a shame to go indoors on such a night. And you don’t really think you would regret being shut off from the world, Yolande, in this solitude?”

She was looking along the still loch, and the wooded shores, and the moonlit crags that were mirrored in the glassy water ; and her eyes were happy enough.

"Is it not like fairy-land, papa. How could one regret living in such a beautiful place? Besides," she added, cheerfully, "have I not promised?" And therewith she held out her ungloved hand for a second; and he understood what she meant, for he saw the three diamonds on her engagement-ring clear in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XX.

"MELVILLE'S WELCOME HOME."

AMID all the hurry and bustle of preparing for the Twelfth, Yolande and her affairs seemed half-forgotten; and she, for one, was glad to forget them; for she rejoiced in the activity of the moment, and was proud to see that the wheels of the little household worked very smoothly. And long ago she had mastered all the details about the luncheon to be sent up the hill, and the dinner for the gillies, and what not; she had got her instructions from Mrs. Graham at Inverstry.

In the midst of all this, however, the Master of Lynn wrote the following note to his sister:—

"Lynn Towers, August 8.

"DEAR POLLY—I wish to goodness you would come over here for a couple of days, and put matters straight. I am helpless. I go for a little quiet to Allt-nam-ba. I would ask Jack Melville to interfere; but he is so blunt-tongued he would most likely make the row worse. Of course it's all Tabby: if ever I succeed to Lynn won't I make the old cat skip out of that. I expected my father to be cross when I suggested something about Yolande; but I thought he would see the reasonableness, etc. But Tabby heard of it; and then it was all 'alliance with demagogues,' 'disgrace of an ancient family,' 'the Leslies selling their honour for money,' and other rubbish. I don't mind. It doesn't hurt me. I have not knocked about with Jack Melville for nothing; I can distinguish between missiles that are made of air and pass by you, and missiles that are made of granite or wood, and can cut your head open. But the immediate thing is this:

they won't call on the Winterbournes; and this is not only a gross discourtesy, but very impolitic. I should not at all wonder if Mr. Winterbourne has a good season this year, if he were to take a lease of Allt-nam-ba; and Duncan is reckoning on 1200 brace. As a good tenant, my father ought to call on Mr. Winterbourne, if for nothing else. And, of course, matters cannot remain as they are. There must be an explanation. What I am dreadfully afraid of is that Yolande may meet Tabby some day, and that Tabby may say something. At present they have only met driving—I mean since you left—so that was only a case of bowing. To hear Tabby talk would make you laugh; but it makes me rather wild, I confess; and though my father says less, or nothing at all, I can see that what she says is making him more and more determined. So do come along, and bring some common sense into the atmosphere of the house. What on earth has politics got to do with Yolande? Come and fight it out with Tabby.—Your affectionate brother,

“A. LESLIE.”

This was the answer that arrived on the evening of the next day:—

“Inverstroy, August 9.

“DEAR ARCHIE—You must have gone mad. We have five visitors in the house already, and by the day after tomorrow we shall be full to the hall-door. It is quite absurd; Jim has not asked a single bachelor this year; and every man who is coming is bringing his wife. Did you ever hear of such a thing—really I can't understand why women should be such fools: not a single invitation refused! But there is one thing—they will get a good dose of grouse-talk before they go south; and if they are not heartily sick of hearing about stags it will be a wonder. So you see, my dear Master, you must worry out of that muddle in your own way; and I have no doubt you got into it through temper, and being uncivil to Aunt Colquhoun. It is impossible for me to leave Inverstroy at present. But, whatever you do, don't get spiteful and go and run away with *Shena Vàn*.—Your affectionate sister,

“POLLY.”

Well, it was not until the eve of the Twelfth that Yolande gave her first dinner-party; the delay having chiefly been occasioned by their having to wait for some wine from Inverness. This was a great concession on the part of her father; but when he discovered that she was desperately afraid that her two guests, the Master of Lynn and Mr. Melville, would imagine that the absence of wine from the table was due to her negligence and stupidity as a housekeeper, he yielded at once. Nay, in case they might throw any blame on her of any kind, her father himself wrote to a firm in Inverness, laying strict injunctions on them as to brands and so forth. All of which trouble was quite thrown away, as it turned out, for both the young men seemed quite indifferent about drinking anything; but the wine was there, and Yolande could not be blamed: that was his chief and only consideration.

Just before dinner Mr. Winterbourne, Yolande, and the Master were standing outside the lodge, looking down the wide glen, which was now flooded with sunset light. Young Leslie's eyes were the eyes of a deer-stalker; the slightest movement anywhere instantly attracted them; and when two sheep—little dots they were, at the far edge of the hill just above the lodge—suddenly ceased grazing and lifted their heads, he knew there must be some one there. The next moment a figure appeared on the sky-line.

"I suppose that is Jack Melville," he said, peevishly. "I wish he wouldn't come across the forest when he is up at his electric boxes."

"But does he do harm?" said Yolande. "He cannot shoot deer with copper wires."

"Oh, he's all over the place," said the Master of Lynn. "And there isn't a keeper or a watcher who will remonstrate with him; and of course I can't. He's always after his botany, or his fishing, or something. The best thing about it is that he is a capital hand to have with you if there are any stray deer about, and you want to have a shot without disturbing the herd. He knows their ways most wonderfully, and can tell you the track they are certain to take."

Meanwhile the object of these remarks was coming down the hillside at a swinging pace; and very soon he had crossed the little bridge, and was coming up the path—heralding his

arrival with a frank and careless greeting to his friends. He was a rather tall, lean, large-boned and powerful-looking man of about eight-and-twenty; somewhat pale in face, seeing that he lived so much out-of-doors; his hair a raven black; his eyes gray, penetrating, and steadfast; his mouth firm, and yet mobile and expressive at times; his forehead square rather than lofty; his voice, a chest-voice, was heard in pleasant and well-modulated English; he had not acquired any trace of the high falsetto that prevails (or prevailed a few years ago?) among the young men at Oxford. As for his manner, that was characterised chiefly by a curious simplicity and straightforwardness. He seemed to have no time to be self-conscious. When he spoke to any one, it was without thought or heed of any bystander. With that one person he had to do. Him or her he seized, with look and voice; and even after the most formal introduction he would speak to you in the most simple and direct way, as if life were not long enough to be wasted in conventionalities; as if truth were the main thing; as if all human beings were perfectly alike; and as if there was no reason in the world why this new stranger should not be put on the footing of a friend. If he had an affectation, it was to represent himself as a lazy and indolent person, who believed in nothing, and laughed at everything, whereas he was extremely industrious and indefatigable; while there were certainly two or three things that he believed in—more, perhaps, than he would confess.

“Here, Miss Winterbourne,” said he, “is the little vasculum I spoke to you about; it has seen some service, but it may do well enough. And here is Bentley’s *Manual*; and a *Flora*. The *Flora* is an old one; I brought an old one purposely, for at the beginning there is a synopsis of the Linnæan system of classification, and you will find that the easiest way of making out the name of a new plant. Of course,” he added, when he had put the vasculum and the books on the window-sill and come back, “when you get farther on; when you begin to see how all these plants have grown to be what they are; when you come to study the likenesses and relationships—and unless you mean to go so far you are only wasting time to begin—you will follow Jussieu and De Candolle; but in the meantime you will find the Linnæan system a very dodgy

instrument when you are in a difficulty. Then, another thing—mind, I am assuming that you mean business—if you want to frivvle, and pick pretty poses, I shut my door on you—but, I say, if you mean business, I have told Mrs. Bell you are to have access to my herbarium, whether I am there or not——”

But here Yolande began to laugh.

“Oh yes, that is so probable!” said she. “Mrs. Bell allowing me to go into your study——!”

“Mrs. Bell and I understand each other very well, I assure you,” he said, gravely. “We are only two augurs, who wink at each other; or rather we shut our eyes to each other’s humbug——”

“Why, Jack, she means to buy back Monaglen for you!” the Master of Lynn exclaimed.

“I know she has some romantic scheme of that sort in her head,” he said, frankly. “It is quite absurd. What should I do with Monaglen? However, in the meantime I have made pretty free use of the old lady’s money at Gress; and she is highly pleased, for she was fond of my father’s family, and she likes to hear me spoken well of, and you can so easily purchase gratitude—especially with somebody else’s money. You see, it works well all round. Mrs. Bell, who is an honest, shrewd, good, kindly woman, sees that her charity is administered with some care; the people around—but especially the children—are benefited; I have leisure for any little experiments and my idle rambles; and if Mrs. Bell and I hoodwink each other, it is done very openly, and there is no great harm.”

“She was very indignant,” said young Leslie, laughing, “when you wouldn’t have your name put on the tablet in the schoolhouse.”

“What tablet?” said Yolande.

“Oh, a tablet saying that Mr. Melville had built the school and presented it to the people of Gress.”

“And I never contributed a farthing!” he said. “She did the whole thing. Well, now, that shows how artificial the position is; and, necessarily, it won’t last. We have for so long been hypocrites for the public good—let us say it was for the public good; but there must come an end.”

“Why, Jack, if you leave Gress you’ll fairly break the old

dame's heart. And as for the neighbourhood—it will be like the going away of Aikendrum.”

“Who was that?” said Yolande.

“I am sure I don't know. Mrs. Bell will sing the song for you, if you ask her; she knows all those old things. I don't know who the gentleman was; but they made a rare fuss about his going away.

‘Bout him the carles were gabbin’
The braw laddies sabbin’,
And a’ the lasses greetin’
For that Aikendrum’s awa’.’”

“The dinner is ready, madam,” said a soft-voiced and pretty Highland maid-servant, appearing at the door; and Yolande's heart sank within her. She summoned up her courage, nevertheless; she walked into the room sedately, and took her place at the head of the table with much graciousness, though she was in reality very nervous and terribly anxious about the result of this wild experiment. Well, she need not have been anxious. The dinner was excellently cooked, and very fairly served. And if those two younger men seemed quite indifferent as to what they ate and drank, and much more interested in a discussion about certain educational matters, at least Mr. Winterbourne noted and approved; and greatly comforted was she from time to time to hear him say: “Yolande, this is capital hare soup; why can't we get hare soup cooked in this way in the south?” or “Yolande, these are most delicious trout. Mr. Melville's catching, I suppose? It seems to me you've stumbled on an uncommonly good cook;” or “What? Another robbery of Mrs. Bell's poultry-yard? Well, they're fine birds—noble, noble. We must send her some grouse to-morrow, Yolande.”

And then outside there was a sudden and portentous growl of bass drones; and then the breaking away into the shrill clear music of a quickstep; and through the blue window-panes they could see in the dusk the tall, tightly-built figure of young Duncan, the pipes over his shoulder, marching erect and proud up and down the gravel-path. That was the proper way to hear the pipes—away up there in the silence of the hills, amid the gathering gloom of the night; and now they would grow louder and shriller as he drew near, and now they would grow

fainter and fainter as he passed by; while all around them, whether the music was faint or shrill, was the continuous hushed murmur of the mountain streams.

"I told Duncan," said Yolande to the Master, "that it was a shame he should keep all his playing for the shepherds in the bothy. And he told me that he very well knew the *Hills of Lynn*."

Young Leslie regarded her with an odd kind of smile.

"You don't think that is the *Hills of Lynn*, do you, Yolande?"

"Is it not? I have heard very few."

"No; I am not first favourite to-night. It isn't the *Hills of Lynn*. That is *Melville's Welcome Home*."

Yolande looked surprised, but not in any way guilty.

"I assure you, Miss Winterbourne," said Jack Melville, pleasantly enough, "that I don't feel at all hurt or insulted. I know Duncan means no sarcasm. He is quite well aware that we haven't had a home to welcome us this many a day; but he is not playing the quickstep out of irony. He and I are too old friends for that."

"Oh, I am sure he does not mean anything like that," said Yolande. "It is a great compliment he means, is it not?"

Then coffee came; and cigars and pipes were produced; and as Yolande had no dread of tobacco-smoke, they all remained together, drawing in their chairs to the brisk fire of wood and peat, and forming a very friendly, snug, and comfortable little circle. Nor was their desultory chatting about educational projects solely; nor, on the other hand, was it confined to grouse and the chances of the weather; it rambled over many and diverse subjects, while always, from time to time, could be heard in the distance (for Duncan had retired to regale his friends in the bothy) the faint echoes of *The 79th's Farewell to Gibraltar* or *Mackenzie's Farewell to Sutherland*, or *The Barren Rocks of Aden*, with occasionally the sad, slow wail of a Lament—*Lord Lovat's* or *Mackintosh's* or *Mac Crimmon's*. And as Mr. Melville proved to be a very ready talker (as he lay back there in an easy-chair, with the warm rays of the fire lighting up his fine, intellectual features and clear and penetrating gray eyes) Mr. Winterbourne had an abundant opportunity of studying this new friend; and so far from

observing in him any of the browbeating and brusqueness he had heard of, on the contrary, he discovered the most ample tolerance, and, more than that, a sort of large-hearted humanity, a sympathy, a sincerity and directness of speech, that began to explain to him why Mr. Melville of Gress was such a favourite with those people about there. He seemed to assume that the person he was talking to was his friend, and that it was useless to waste time in formalities of conversation. His manner towards Yolande (her father thought) was characterised by just a little too much of indifference; but then he was a schoolmaster, and not in the habit of attaching importance to the opinions of young people.

It was really a most enjoyable, confidential, pleasant evening; but it had to come to an end; and when the two young men left, both Yolande and her father accompanied them to the door. The moon was risen now, and the long wide glen looked beautiful enough.

"Well, now, Mr. Melville," said Mr. Winterbourne as they were going away, "whenever you have an idle evening, I hope you will remember us and take pity on us."

"You may see too much of me."

"That is impossible," said Yolande, quickly; and then she added very prettily: "You know, Mr. Melville, if you come often enough you will find it quite natural that Duncan should play for you *Melville's Welcome Home*."

He stood for a moment uncertain; it was the first sign of embarrassment he had shown that night.

"Well," said he, "that is the most friendly thing that has been said to me for many a day. Who could resist such an invitation? Good-night—good-night!"

CHAPTER XXI.

NEIGHBOURS.

JOHN SHORTLANDS, as it turned out, could not come north till the 20th; so Mr. Winterbourne asked young Leslie to shoot with him for the first week; and the invitation had been gratefully accepted. The obligation, however, was not all on

one side. The Master of Lynn was possessed of a long and familiar experience of the best and swiftest methods of getting the birds sent to a good market ; and he made his arrangements in this direction with a business-like forethought which amused Mr. Winterbourne, who expressed some whimsical scruples over his being transformed into a game-dealer.

"I don't look at it in that light at all," the Master said, coolly. "Game is the only thing land like that will produce ; and I like to know what it is worth. I think I can guarantee that the hire of the gillies and ponies and panniers won't cost you a farthing."

"You should not be so anxious to have your own moor hard shot," said Mr. Winterbourne, with a smile.

"But I am," said this shrewd young man. "There is no danger on ground like this of too small a breeding-stock being left. It is all the other way. What I am afraid of is too big a stock, and the disease coming along. That is a terrible business. You are congratulating yourself on the number of birds, and on their fine condition ; and some pleasant morning you wake up to find the place swept clean."

"Not in one night?"

"Well, a day or two will do it. This epidemic is quite different from the ordinary mild forms of disease, where you can see the birds pining away to death. Instead of that you find them all about among the heather, dead, but perfectly plump and well-looking, not a sign of disease outside or in. So, if you please, Mr. Winterbourne, don't have any scruples about turning on Duncan if you think we are not doing well enough. The bigger consignments we can send off the better."

Now one consequence of this arrangement was that when Yolande, in the morning, had said "Good-bye, papa !" and "Good-bye, Archie !" and given each of them a flower or some such trifle (for in that part of the country the presentation of a small gift, no matter what, to any one going shooting, is supposed to bring good-luck), and when she had seen that luncheon was quite prepared to be sent up the hill when the first pony left, she found herself with the whole day before her, with no companion, and with no occupation save that of wandering down the glen or up one of the hillsides in search of new flowers. It is not to be wondered at, then, that she

should seek some variety by occasionally driving into Gress, when the dog-cart was taking the game shot the day before to Foyers, and spending a few hours with Mrs. Bell until the trap came back to pick her up again. For one thing, when she discovered some plant unknown to her, she found it much easier to consult Mr. Melville's herbarium than to puzzle over the descriptions of the various species in the *Flora*; and as he was generally occupied either in the schoolhouse or in his laboratory, she did not interfere with him. But the truth is, she liked this shrewd, kindly, wise old Scotchwoman, who was the only one in the neighbourhood who took any notice of her. The people at the Towers had neither called nor made any other overtures. And as Mrs. Bell's thoughtfulness and kindness took the substantial form of sending up to Allt-nam-ba, pretty nearly every day, some article or articles likely to be of use to the young housekeeper, of course Yolande had to drive in to thank her.

"Mrs. Bell," said she, one warm and sunny afternoon, when they were together in the garden (this good woman made awful havoc among her flowers when Yolande came to see her), "who was Aikendrum?"

"A young lad who went away for a sodger—so the song says."

"And every one was so sorry, is it not so?" said this tall young lady, who already had her hands full of flowers. "The Master was saying that, if Mr. Melville leaves here, every one will be quite as sorry—it will be like the going away of Aikendrum."

"Why should he go?" said Mrs. Bell, sharply. "Why should he not stay among his own people—yes, and on land that may be his own one day?" And then she added more gently: "It is not a good thing for one to be away among strangers; there's many a sore heart comes o' that. It's not only them that are left behind, sometimes it's the one that goes away that is sorrowfu' enough about it. I daresay, now, ye never heard o' an old Scotch song they call 'The sun rises bright in France'?"

"Oh, will you sing it for me?" said Yolande, eagerly; for indeed the reputation of this good dame for the singing of those old Scotch songs was wide in that district: though it was not every one whom she would honour. And her singing was

strangely effective. She had but little of a voice ; she crooned rather than sang ; but she could give the words a curiously pathetic quality ; and she had the natural gift of knowing what particular airs she could make tell.

She laid her hand on Yolande's arm—as if to ask for attention—

*“ The sun rises bright in France,
And fair sets he ;
But he has tint the blink he had
In my ain countrie.
It's no my ain ruin
That weets aye my e'e,
But the dear Marie I left behind
Wi' sweet bairnies three.”*

“ Ye've no heard that before ? ”

“ Oh no. It is a very sad air. But why Marie?—that is French.”

“ Well, ye see, the French and the Scotch were very thick¹ in former days ; and Marie was a common name in Scotland. I am told they spoke nothing but French at Holyrood ; and the young gentlemen, they were all for joining the French service——”

“ But is there no more of the song, Mrs. Bell ? ”

“ Oh, ay ; there are other two verses. But it's no for an auld wife like me to be singing havers.”

“ Please ! ”

“ Very well, then—

*‘ The bud comes back to summer,
And the blossom to the tree,
But I win back—oh, never,
To my ain countrie.
Gladness comes to many,
Sorrow comes to me,
As I look o'er the wide ocean
To my ain countrie.*

*‘ Fu' bienly low'd my ain hearth,
And smiled my ain Marie :
Oh ! I've left my heart behind
In my ain countrie !*

¹ Thick—intimate.

'O I'm leal to high heaven,
Which aye was leal to me!
And it's there I'll meet ye a' soon,
Frae my ain countrie.'"¹

"It is a beautiful air—but so sad," Yolande said; and then she added slyly, "and now *Aikendrum*."

But Mrs. Bell doggedly refused.

"I tell ye it's no for an auld wife like me to be fashing with such blethers; it's for young lassies when they're out at the herding. And I hope, now, that ye are no likely to put any *Aikendrum* notions into Mr. Melville's head. Let him stay where he is. Maybe we'll get him a better stance² in the country-side soon; stranger things have come to pass."

"I?" said Yolande; "is it likely I should wish him to go away? Perhaps you do not know, then, that I am going to live in this neighbourhood—no?"

"Oh, indeed; is that possible noo?" said Mrs. Bell—and she would say no more. She was herself most kindly and communicable; but always she preserved a certain reserve of manner in a case like this—it was not her "place" to betray curiosity. However, Yolande was quite frank.

"Oh yes," said the young lady, cheerfully. "Of course I must live here when I am married; and of course, too, I look forward to seeing Mr. Melville always. He will be our nearest friend—almost the only one. But it is so difficult to catch him. Either he is in the school; or he is up at the water-wheel—why, this moment, now, if I could see him, I would ask him to drive out to Allt-nam-ba, when the carriage comes, and stay to dine with us."

"I wish ye would—eh, I wish ye would, my dear young leddy!" the old dame exclaimed. "For the way he goes on is just distressing! Not a settled proper meal will he sit down to! nothing but a piece of cold meat aye to be standing by. There it is—in there among they smelling chemical things—day and night there must aye be the same thing on the side table waiting for him—some cold meat, a bit o' bread, and a wee, scrimpit, half-pint bottle o' that fushionless claret-wine

¹ The words of this song are by Allan Cunningham, the music is an old Celtic air.

² Stance—holding or position.

that is not one preen point better than vinegar. And then when he gives the bairns a day's holiday, and starts away for Loch-na-lairige—a place that no one has ever won to but the shepherds—not a thing in his pocket but a piece o' bread and cheese. How he keeps up his strength—a big-boned man like that—passes me. If ye want to anger him, that's the way to do it—compel him to sit doon to a respectable meal and get the lasses to prepare a few things for him in a clever kind o' way, as ye would get in any Christian house. Well, many a time I think if that's the mainner they train young men at Oxford they would be better brought up at another place. And what is the use of it? His means are far beyond his wants—I take care there is no wasterfulness in the house-keeping, for one thing; and even if they were not, is there not my money?—and a proud woman I would be that day that he would take a penny of it!”

At this moment the object of these remarks came out of the laboratory—a small building standing at right angles with the house—and he was buttoning his coat as if he had just put it on.

“Good afternoon, Miss Winterbourne,” said he, and he seemed very pleased to see her as he took her hand for a second. “I thought I heard your voice. And I have got a word of approval for you.”

“Oh indeed?” said she, smiling; for occasionally his schoolmaster air and his condescending frankness amused her.

“I had a look over my herbarium last night; you have been very careful.”

“You thought I should not be?”

“I did not know. But if there had been any confusion or mischief done, I should not have mentioned it—no, probably I should have let you have your will; only, I would never have allowed any one else to go near the place; so, you see, you would have been inflicting injury on an unknown number of persons in the future.”

“But how wrong not to tell me!” she exclaimed.

“Oh, you have been careful enough. Indeed you have taken unnecessary trouble. It is quite enough if the different genera are kept separate; it is not necessary that the species should follow in the same order as they are in the *Flora*. You must not give yourself that trouble again.”

"When the dog-cart comes along," said she, "I hope you will drive out with me to Allt-nam-ba, and spend the evening with us."

"You are very kind."

"No, I am scheming," she said. "The truth is the fish-monger at Inverness has disappointed me—no, no, no, Mrs. Bell, on the whole he has been very good; but this time there is a mistake; and do you think, Mr. Melville, if you were taking your rod you could get me a few trout out of the loch on the way home? Is it too much to ask?"

He glanced at the sky. "I think we might manage it," said he, "though it is rather clear. There may be a breeze on the loch; there generally is up there. But what we ought to do is to set out now, and walk it; and let the trap pick us up at the loch. Can you walk so far?"

"I should think so!" said Yolande. "And be delighted too."

"Well, I will go and get my rod and basket. Then as we go along I can tell you the names of any plants you don't know, or answer any questions that may be puzzling you. Don't be afraid to ask. I like it. It helps to keep one's recollections clear. And I never laugh at ignorance; it is the pretence of knowledge that is contemptible."

They did not, however, talk botany exclusively as they walked away from Gress, on this beautiful afternoon; for he very speedily discovered that she knew far more about him and his family and his affairs than he could possibly have imagined.

"The days in Egypt were long," she explained, "and the Master used to tell me all about this neighbourhood until, when I came to it, everything seemed quite familiar."

"You have been a great traveller," he said.

"Yes; we have travelled about a good deal. And you?"

"Not much. I think I am too lazy. The kind of travelling that I enjoy is to sit out in the garden of a summer evening, in an easy-chair, and to watch the sunset, and, perhaps, the moon slowly rising——"

"But you said travelling," she said.

"Well, you are hurling along at a rate of 68,000 miles an hour; isn't that quick enough for anything?" he said, laughing.

"It is a cheap way of travelling," said she, with a smile.

"That is why it suits me."

"But you don't see much?"

"No! Not when you can watch the stars appear, one by one, over the hill-tops? Don't you think they are as interesting as the shops in the Palais Royal? They are more mysterious, at all events. It does seem odd, you know, when you think of the numbers of human beings all over the world—the small, tiny creatures—sticking up their little tin tubes at the midnight sky, and making guesses at what the stars are made of, and how they came to be there. It is a pathetic kind of thing to think about. I fancy I must try a 'Zulu' and a 'March Brown'?"

This startling *non sequitur* was caused by the fact that by this time they had reached the loch, and that he frequently thought aloud in this fashion, heedless of any incongruity, and heedless also of his companion. He sat down on a lump of granite, and took out his fly-book.

"Won't you walk on to the lodge, Miss Winterbourne?" said he. "I am going to drift down in the boat, and it will be slow work for you."

"I will wait on the bank," said she, "and watch. Do you not understand that I am seriously interested?"

"Then you will see whether I get any. It is a sport," he added, as he was selecting the flies, "that there is less to be said against than shooting, I imagine. I don't like the idea of shooting birds, especially after I have missed one or two. Birds are such harmless creatures. But a fish is different—the fish is making a murderous snap at an innocent fly, or what he thinks to be a fly, when a little bit of steel catches him in the very act. It serves him right, from the moral point of view."

"But surely he is justified in trying to get his dinner," said she. "Just as you are doing now?"

"Well, I will put on a jay's wing also," said he, "and if they don't like one or other of those nice wholesome little dishes, we must try them with something else."

As it happened, however, the trout seemed disposed to rise to anything; for it was a good fishing afternoon—warm, with a light wind ruffling the surface of the loch. By the time the

dog-cart came along he had got close on two dozen in his basket, averaging about three to the pound, so that a selection from them would do very well for dinner; and when he got ashore, and got into the trap, Yolande thanked him for them very prettily, while he, on the other hand, said that the obligation was all on his side.

"Why do you not come oftener, then?" she said, as they were driving along up the wide glen.

"I might be depriving some one else of the use of the boat," he answered.

"No, no; how can that be?" she insisted. "They are all day up the hill. Why do you not come to the loch every afternoon, and then come in and spend the evenings with us. Mrs. Bell says you do very wrong about your food, not having proper meals at proper times. Now we are always very punctual; and if you came in and dined with us, it would teach you good habits."

"You are too kind, Miss Winterbourne," said he. "But please don't think that I have forgotten the invitation you gave me the other night. I could not be so ungrateful as that."

"And the use of remembering, if you do not act on it?" said she—but she could not lecture the schoolmaster any further just then, for they had arrived at the wooden bridge, and she had to let the cob go very cautiously over that primitive structure.

After dinner that evening Mr. Winterbourne begged to be excused for a short time, as he had a letter to write that he wished posted at Whitebridge the same night. This was the letter:—

"Allt-nam-ba, August 15.

"DEAR SHORTLANDS—I am sending you a couple of brace of birds, and would send you more, but that I can see that my future son-in-law regards these bequests with great disfavour; and as it is in my interest that he is trying to make as much as he can out of the shooting, I don't like to interfere with his economical exertions. Prudence in a young man should be encouraged rather than checked. I hope you will not be later than the 20th. I shall be glad to have you here.

The fact is, I have been torturing myself with doubts and questions, which may appear to you uncalled for. I hope they are uncalled for. Indeed, to all appearance, everything is going on well. Yolande is in the brightest spirits, and is delighted with the place; and young Leslie seems very proud of her and affectionate. The only thing is whether I should not have put the whole facts of the case before him at the outset; and whether I am not bound in honour to do so now, before the serious step of marriage is taken. I don't know. I am afraid to do it; and afraid of what might happen if I remain silent. There is a young man here, a Mr. Melville, who was Leslie's tutor, and who remains his intimate associate and friend. He is very highly respected about here; and, as I judge, seems to deserve the high opinion every one has of him. What I am thinking of now is the propriety of laying the whole affair before him, as Leslie's nearest friend. He knows the other members of the family also. I could trust him to give an honest opinion; and if he, knowing all the circumstances of the case, and knowing Leslie, and the ways of the family, were to think it unnecessary to break silence, then I might be fairly justified in letting the thing be as it is. Do you not think so? But you will answer this question in person—not later than the 20th, I hope.

“For a long time I thought that, if only Yolande were married and settled quietly in the country, there would be no further need for anxiety; but now I cannot keep from speculating on other possibilities, and wondering whether it would not be better to prevent any future ground of complaint, and consequent unhappiness, by telling the whole truth now. Surely that might be done without letting Yolande know? Why should she ever know?

“If you can leave on the night of the 18th, you will reach Inverness next forenoon, and catch the 3 P.M. boat down the Caledonian Canal. Most likely you will find Yolande waiting for you at the pier; she likes driving. Our prospects for the 20th are fairly good; there is more cover for black game up those mountainous corries than I could have expected. We shoot all we find, as they don't stop here through the winter. On the 12th we had sixty-eight brace grouse, one ptarmigan, one snipe, and a few mountain hares; on the 13th, seventy-

one brace grouse, and also some hares ; yesterday it was wet and wild, and we only went out for an hour or so in the afternoon—nine brace ; to-day was fine, and we got sixty-two brace grouse, and one and a half brace ptarmigan. Young Leslie is about the best all-round shot I have ever seen ; cool and certain. I think I get more nervous year by year ; but then he is a capital hand at redeeming mistakes, and that gives one a little more confidence. A stag and three hinds passed close by the lodge late last night—at least so the shepherds say.

“I know you won’t mind my asking you to bring some little trifle or other for Yolande, just to show that you were thinking of her. She will meet you at Foyers Pier.—Yours faithfully,
G. R. WINTERBOURNE.”

CHAPTER XXII.

“IM WALD UND AUF DER HEIDE.”

NEXT morning there was a sudden call on Mr. Winterbourne to dismiss these fears and anxieties. The little community away up there in the solitude of the hills was suddenly thrown into violent commotion. A young gillie who had been wandering about had come running back to the bothy, declaring that he had seen a stag go into the wood just above the lodge ; and of course the news was immediately carried to the house ; and instantly the two gentlemen came out—Mr. Winterbourne eager and excited, the Master of Lynn not quite so sure of the truth of the report. Duncan, to tell the truth, was also inclined to doubt ; for this young lad had, until the previous year, been a deck-hand on board the *Dunara Castle*, and knew a great deal more about skarts and sea-gulls than about stags. Moreover, the shepherds had been through the wood this same morning, with their dogs. However, it was determined, after much hurried consultation, not to miss the chance, if there was a chance. The day, in any case, threatened to turn out badly ; the clouds were coming closer and closer down ; to drive this wood would be a short and practicable undertaking that would carry them on conveniently to lunch

time. And so it was finally arranged that Mr. Winterbourne should go away by himself to a station that he knew, commanding certain gullies that the stag, if there were a stag, would most likely make for; while the Master would stay behind, and, after a calculated interval, go through the wood with Duncan and the beaters.

In the midst of all this Miss Yolande suddenly made her appearance in a short-skirted dress, thick boots, and deer-stalker's cap.

"What do *you* want?" her father said, abruptly, and with a stare.

"I am going with you," was her cool answer.

"Indeed you are not."

"Why not, then?"

"Women going deer-stalking!" he exclaimed. "What next?"

"Can I not be as quiet as any one? Why should I not go with you? I have climbed the hill many times, and I know very well where to hide, for Duncan showed me the place."

"Go spin, you jade, go spin!" her father said, as he shouldered the heavy rifle, and set off on the long and weary struggle up the hill.

Yolande turned to the Master.

"Is he not unkind!" she said, in a crestfallen way.

"If I were you," said he, laughing, "I would go all the same."

"Should I do any harm? Is it possible that I could do any harm?" she asked, quickly.

"Not a bit of it! What harm could you do? There is room for a dozen people to hide in that place; and if you keep your head just a little bit above the edge, and keep perfectly still, you will see the whole performance in the gully below. If there is a stag in the wood, and if I don't get a shot at him, he is almost sure to go up through the gullies. You won't scream I suppose? And don't move—if you move a finger he will see you. And don't tumble into too many moss-holes, Yolande, when you are crossing the moor. And don't break your ankles in a peat-hag. And don't topple over the edge when you get to the gullies."

"Do you think you will frighten me? No, I am going as soon as papa is out of sight."

"Oh, you can't go wrong," said he, good-naturedly. "The only thing is, when you get to the top of the hill, you might go on some three or four hundred yards before crossing the moor, so as to keep well back from the wood."

"Oh yes, certainly," said Yolande. "I understand very well."

Accordingly, some little time thereafter, she set out on her self-imposed task; and she was fully aware that it was a fairly arduous one. Even here at the outset it was pretty stiff work, for the hill rose sheer away from the little plateau on which the lodge stood, and the ground was rugged in some parts, and a morass in others; while there was an abundance of treacherous holes where the heather grew long among the rocks. But she had certain landmarks to guide her. At first there was a sheep track, then she made for two juniper bushes, then for certain conspicuous boulders; then, higher up, she came on a rough and stony face where the climbing was pretty difficult; then by the edge of a little hollow that had a tree or two in it; and then, as she was now nearly at the top, and as there was a smooth boulder convenient, she thought she would sit down for a minute to regain her breath. Far below her the lodge and its dependencies looked like so many small toy houses; she could see the tiny figures of human beings moving about; in the perfect silence she could hear the whining of the dogs shut up in the kennel. Then one of those miniature figures waved something white; she returned the signal. Then she rose and went on again; she crossed a little burn; she passed along the edge of some steep gullies leading away down to the Corrie-an-Eich—that is, the Corrie of the Horses; and finally, after some further climbing, she reached the broad, wide, open, undulating moorland, from which nothing was visible but a wilderness of bare and bleak mountain-tops, all as silent as the grave.

She had been up here twice or thrice before; but she never came upon this scene of vast and voiceless desolation without being struck by a sort of terror. It seemed away out of the world. And on this morning a deeper gloom than usual hung over it; the clouds were low and heavy; there was a brooding

stillness in the air. She was glad that some one had preceded her ; the solitude of this place was terrible.

And now as she set out to cross the wild moorland she discovered that that was a much more serious undertaking than when she had a friendly hand to lend her assistance from time to time. This wide plain of moss and bog and heather was intersected by a succession of peat-hags, the oozy black soil of which was much more easy to slide down into than to clamber out of. The Master of Lynn had taught her how to cross these hags : one step down, then a spring across, then her right hand grasped by his right hand, then her elbow caught by his left hand, and she stood secure on the top of the other bank. But now, as she scrambled down the one side, so she had to scramble up the other, generally laying hold of a bunch of heather to help her ; and as she was anxious not to lose her way, she made a straight course across this desert waste, and did not turn aside for drier or smoother ground as one better acquainted with the moor might have done. However, she struggled on bravely. The first chill struck by that picture of desolation had gone. She was thinking more of the deer now. She hoped she would be up in time. She hoped her father would get a chance. And of course she made perfectly certain that if he did get a chance he would kill the stag ; and then there would be a joyful procession back to the lodge ; and a rare to-do among the servants and the gillies, with perhaps a dance in the evening to the skirl of Duncan's pipes.

All at once a cold wind began to blow, and about a minute thereafter she had no more idea of where she was than if she had been in the middle of the Atlantic. The whole world had been suddenly shut out from her ; all she could see was a yard or two, either way, of the wet moss and heather. This gray cloud that had come along was raw to the throat and to the eyes, but it did not deposit much moisture on her clothes ; its chief effect was the bewilderment of not seeing anything. And yet she thought she ought to go on. Perhaps she might get out of it. Perhaps the wind would carry it off. And so she kept on as straight as she could guess, but with much more caution ; for at any moment she might fall into one of the deep holes worn by the streams in the peat, or into one of the moss-holes where the vegetation was so treacherously green.

But as she went on and on, and could find nothing that she could recognise, she grew afraid. Moreover there was a roaring of a waterfall somewhere, which seemed to her louder than anything she had heard about there before. She began to wonder how far she had come, and to fear that in the mist she had lost her direction, and might be in the immediate neighbourhood of some dangerous precipice. And then—as she was looking all round her helplessly—her heart stood still with fright. There—away in that vague pall that encompassed her—stood the shadow, the ghost of an animal,—a large, visionary thing, motionless and noiseless, at a distance that she could not compute. And now she felt sure that that was the stag they were in search of; and, strangely enough, her agony of fear was not that she might by accident be shot through being in the neighbourhood of the deer, but that she might by some movement on her part scare it away. She stood motionless, her heart now beating with excitement, her eyes fixed on this faint shade away in there, in the gray. It did not move; she did not move. She kept her hands clenched by her side, so that she should not tremble. She dared not even sink into the heather and try to hide there. But the next moment she had almost screamed, for there was a hurried, rushing noise behind her, and as she (in spite of herself) wheeled round to face this new danger, a troop of phantoms went flying by—awful things they appeared to be until, just as they passed her, she recognised them to be humble and familiar sheep. Moreover, when she saw that other animal out there disappear along with them—the whole of them looming large and mysterious in this cloud-world—she made sure that that had been a sheep also; and she breathed more freely. Must not these animals have been disturbed by her father? Ought she not to make back in the direction from which they had come? To go any farther forward she scarcely dared? the roar of water seemed perilously near.

As she thus stood, bewildered, uncertain, and full of a nameless dread, she saw before her a strange thing—a thing that added amazement to her terror—a belt of white, like a waterfall, that seemed to connect earth and sky. It was at an unknown distance, but it appeared to be perfectly vertical; and she knew that no such stupendous waterfall had she either

seen before or heard of. That, then,—that white water,—was the cause of the roaring noise. And then she bethought her of a saying of Archie Leslie, that tales were told of people having gone into this wilderness and never having been heard of again; but that there was one sure way of escape for any one who got astray—to follow any one of the streams. That, he had said, must sooner or later lead you down to Allt-namba. But when she thought of going away over to that white torrent, and seeking to follow its course down through chasm after chasm, she shuddered. For one who knew the country intimately—for a man who could jump from boulder to boulder, and swing himself from bush to bush—it might be possible; for her it was impossible. Nor was there the slightest use in her trying to go back the way she came. She had lost all sense of direction; there was nothing to give her a clue; she was absolutely helpless.

But fortunately she had the good sense to stand still and to consider her position with such calmness as she could muster; and that took time; and during this time, insensibly to herself, the clouds around were growing thinner. Then she noticed that the upper part of that awe-inspiring torrent had receded very considerably—that the white line was no longer vertical, but seemed to stretch back into the distance. Then the moorland visible around her began to grow more extended. Here and there faint visions of hills appeared. And then a flood of joyful recognition broke over her. That awful torrent was nothing but the familiar Allt-cam-bân,¹ its brawling white stream not vertical at all, but merely winding down from the far heights of the hills. She had come too far, certainly; but now she knew that the gullies she was in search of were just behind her; and that her father's hiding-place was not more than three hundred yards distant. The cloud that had encompassed her was now trailing along the face of the hill opposite her; the gloomy landscape was clear in all its features. With a light heart she tripped along, over heather, across hags, through sopping moss, until behind a little barricade which Nature had formed at the summit of a precipice overlooking certain ravines—a little box, as it were, that looked as if it had been dug out for the very purpose of deer-slaying—

¹ The White Winding Water.

she found her father quietly standing, and cautiously peering over the ledge.

When he heard her stealthy approach, he quickly turned ; then he motioned her to stoop down and come to him. This she did very cautiously and breathlessly, and presently she was standing beside him, on a spot which enabled her to look down into the gullies beneath. These certainly formed a most admirable deer-trap, if ever there was one. The place consisted of a series of little hills or lumps, probably not more than 150 feet in height, with sheer smooth slopes, here and there lightly wooded, but mostly covered with heather. The gullies between those lumps, again, came to a point in a ravine just underneath where Yolande was standing ; so that, whichever way the deer came, they were almost certain to make up the steep face just opposite this station, and so give the rifleman an excellent chance. Yolande took out her housekeeper's note-book and wrote on the fly-leaf :

"Have you seen anything?"

He shook his head ; and motioned to her to put the book away. It was not a time for trifling. If there were a stag in the unseen woods beyond, it might make its sudden appearance in this silent little ravine at any moment, and might make for the top by some quite unexpected track. He kept his eyes on the watch all along the gullies ; but his head was motionless. Yolande, too, was eager and anxious—but only for a while. As time passed she grew listless. This solitude seemed always to have been a solitude. There was no sign of life in it. Doubtless the young lad had been deceived. And then she grew to thinking of the strange sight she saw in the mist, when the waters of Allt-cam-bân seemed to be one foaming, white, vertical torrent.

Then a shock came to her eyes : a living thing suddenly appeared in that empty solitude ; and at once she clenched her hands. She knew what was expected of her. She remained rigid as a stone ; she would not even raise her head to see if her father saw. She kept her eyes on this startling feature in the landscape ; she held her breath ; she was mainly conscious of a dim fear that this animal that was coming over that hillock at such a speed was not a deer at all but a fox. It was of a light reddish-brown colour. Then it had not come

up any of the gullies, as she had been told to expect ; it had come right over the top of the little hill, with a long, sinuous stride ; and now it was descending again into the ravine. But here she saw it was a deer. Once out of the long heather, and coming nearer, too, it was clear that this was a deer. But surely small ? Where were the great horns ? Or was it a hind ? She knew rather than saw that her father twice aimed his rifle at this animal, whatever it was, as it sped across an open space at the bottom of the ravine. Of course all this happened in a few seconds ; and she had just begun to think that the animal had horns, and was a roebuck, when the lithe, red, sinuous, silent object disappeared altogether behind a ridge. Still she did not move. She did not express disappointment. She would not turn her head.

Then she knew that her father had quickly passed her and jumped on to a clump of heather whence he could get a better view. She followed. The next thing she saw, clear against the sky, and not more than a hundred and twenty yards off, was the head of a deer, the horns thrown back, the nostrils high in the air. The same instant her father fired ; and that strange object (which very much frightened her) disappeared. She saw her father pause for a second to put a fresh cartridge in his rifle ; and then away he hurried to the place where the deer had passed ; and so she thought she might now safely follow. She found her father searching all about, but more particularly studying the peat-hags.

"I do believe I hit him," he said (and there was considerable vexation in his tone). "Look about, Yolande. He must have crossed the peat somewhere. If he is wounded, he may not have gone far. It was only a roebuck — still — such a chance ! Confound it, I believe I've missed him clean !"

He was evidently grievously mortified ; and she was sorry ; for she knew he would worry about it afterwards ; smaller trifles than that made him fidget. But all their searching was in vain. The peat-hags here were narrow ; a frightened deer would clear them.

"If he is wounded, papa, Duncan and the dogs will go after him."

"Oh no," said he, moodily, "I believe I missed him clean."

If he had been hit, he couldn't have got away so fast. Of course, it was only a buck—still——”

“But, papa, it was a most difficult shot! I never saw any creature go at such a pace; and you only saw him for a moment!”

“Yes, and for that moment he looked as big as a cow, against the sky. Nobody but an idiot could have missed the thing!”

“Oh, you need not try to make me believe you are a bad shot,” said she, proudly. “No. Every one knows better than that. I know what Mr. Leslie tells me. And I suppose the very best shot in the world misses sometimes?”

“Well, there is no use waiting here,” said he. “Of course there was no stag. The stag that idiot of a boy saw was this roebuck. If there were a stag, the noise of the shot must have driven him off. Why the mischief I did not fire when he was crossing the gully I don't understand!—I had my rifle up twice——”

“Papa,” said she, suddenly, “what is that?”

She was looking away down into the ravine beneath them—at a dusky red object that was lying in a patch of green bracken. He followed the direction of her eyes.

“Why, surely—yes, it is, Yolande—that is the buck—he must have fallen backwards and rolled right down to the bottom——”

“And you said you were such a bad shot, papa!”

“Oh, that is no such prize,” he said (but he spoke a good deal more cheerfully); “what I wonder is whether the poor beast is dead—I suppose he must be——”

“There they come—there they come—look!” she said; and she was far more excited and delighted than he was. “There is the red gillie at the top, and Duncan coming along by the hollow—and there is Archie——”

She took out her handkerchief, and waved it in the air.

“Don't, Yolande!” said he. “They'll think we've got a stag!”

“We've got all the stag there was to get!” said she, proudly. “And you said you were not a good shot—to shoot a roebuck running at such a pace!”

“You are the most thorough-going flatterer, Yolande!” he

said, laughing (but he was very much pleased all the same). "Why, he wasn't going at all just at the crest—he stopped to sniff the air——"

"But you could only have seen him for the fiftieth part of a second : isn't that the same as running?"

At this moment a voice was heard from below, where a little group of figures had collected round the buck. It was the Master of Lynn who was looking up to them.

"A very fine head, sir!" he called.

"There, didn't I tell you?" she said, proudly—though she had never told him anything of the kind. And then in the excitement of the moment she forgot she had never revealed to her father that little arrangement about the whisky that the Master had suggested to her.

"Duncan," she called down to them.

"Yes, Miss?"

"When you go back home, you will let the beaters have a glass of whisky each."

"Very well, Miss," he called back; and then he proceeded with the slinging of the buck round the shoulders of the red-headed gillie.

"Archie," she called again.

"Yes?"

"If you are back at the lodge first, wait for us. We shall be there in time for lunch."

"All right."

She was very proud and pleased as they trudged away home again over the wild moorland. For her part she could see no difference between a roedeer and a red-deer, except that the former (as she declared) was a great deal pleasanter to eat, as she hoped she would be able to show them. And was it not a far more difficult thing to hit a deer of the size of a roebuck than to hit a stag as tall as a horse?

"Flatterer—flatterer!" he said; but he was mightily well pleased all the same; and indeed to see Yolande gay and cheerful like this was of itself quite enough for him; so that for the time he forgot all his anxieties and fears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CONFIDANT.

ONE evening John Shortlands and Jack Melville were together standing at the door of the lodge, looking down the glen at the very singular spectacle there presented. The day had been dull and overclouded, and seemed about to sink into an equally gloomy evening, when suddenly, at sunset, the western heavens broke into a flame of red; and all at once the stream flowing down through the long valley became one sheet of vivid pink fire, only broken here and there by the big blocks of granite in its channel, which remained of a pale and ghostly gray. It was a very curious effect; for it was the boulders (getting their colour from the over-clouded zenith) that seemed faint and shadowy and phantasmal; while the water was solid, shining, fire-red, and bewildering to the eyes.

The big, burly M.P., however, did not seem wholly occupied with this transfiguration of the heavens. He looked vexed, perturbed, impatient.

"Mr. Melville," he said, abruptly, in his broad Northumbrian intonation, "will you walk down the glen for a bit?"

"Yes; but we should fetch Miss Winterbourne to show her the skies on fire."

"No; it's about her I want to speak to you. Come along."

"About her?" he repeated, with the large clear gray eyes showing some astonishment.

"Or, rather," said his companion, when they had got as far as the bridge, "about her father. Winterbourne is an old friend of mine, and I won't just call him an ass; but the way he is going on at present, shilly-shallying, frightened to say this, frightened to say that, is enough to worry a far stronger man than he is into his grave. Well, if he won't speak, I will. Dang it, I hate mystery! My motto is—Out with it! And he would never have got into this precious mess if he had taken my advice all through."

Melville was surprised; but he did not interrupt. John Shortlands seemed a trifle angry.

"The immediate trouble with him is this: Ought he, or

ought he not, to confide certain matters to you as a friend of young Leslie? Well, I am going to take that into my own hand. I am going to tell you the whole story—and a miserable business it is.”

“Do you think that is wise?” the younger man said, calmly. “If there is anything disagreeable, shouldn’t the knowledge of it be kept to as few people as possible? I would rather have my illusions left. The Winterbournes have been kind to me since they came here; and it has been delightful to me to look at these two—the spectacle of father and daughter——”

“Oh, but I have nothing to say against either of them—God forbid!—except that Winterbourne has been a confounded ass, as it seems to me; or perhaps I should say as it used to seem to me. Well, now, I suppose you know that your friend Leslie and Yolande are engaged?”

“I have understood as much.”

“But did he not tell ye?” said Shortlands, with a stare.

“Well, yes,” the other said, in rather a cold way. “But we did not have much talk about it. Archie Leslie is a very fine fellow; but he and I don’t always agree in our ways of looking at things.”

“Then, at all events, in order to disagree you must know what his way of looking at things is; and that is just the point I’m coming to,” said Shortlands, in his blunt, dogmatic kind of way. “Just this, that Yolande Winterbourne has been brought up all her life to believe that her mother died when she was a child; whereas the mother is not dead, but very much alive—worse luck; and the point is whether he ought to be told; and whether he is a sensible sort of a chap, who would make no fuss about it, and who would see that it could not matter much to him; and, above all, whether he would consent to keep this knowledge back from Yolande, who would only be shocked and horrified by it. Do ye understand? I think I have put it plain—that is, from Winterbourne’s point of view——”

“But surely,” exclaimed Melville, with wide-open eyes,—“surely the best thing—surely the natural thing—would be to tell the girl herself, first of all!”

“Man alive, Winterbourne would rather cut his throat!

Don't you see that his affection for the girl is quite extraordinary? it is the sole passion of his life; a needle-scratch on Yolande's finger is like a knife to his heart. I assure you the misery he has endured in keeping this secret is beyond anything I can tell you; and I do believe he would go through the whole thing again just that Yolande's mind should be free, happy, and careless. Mind you, it was not done through any advice of mine. No; nor was it Winterbourne either who began it; it was his sister. The child was given to her charge when she was about two or three years old, I fancy. Then they were living in Lincolnshire; afterwards they went to France; and the aunt died there. It was she who brought Yolande up to believe her mother dead; and then Winterbourne put off and put off telling her—although twenty times I remonstrated with him—until he found it quite impossible. He couldn't do it. Sometimes when I look at her now, I scarcely wonder. She seems such a radiant kind of a creature that I doubt whether I could bring myself to tell her that story—no, I could not—dang it, I could not! And even when I was having rows with Winterbourne, and telling him what an ass he was, and telling him that the torture he was going through was quite unnecessary, why, man, I thought there was something fine in it too; and again and again I have watched him when he would sit and look at Yolande and listen to all her nonsense, and have seen his face just filled with pleasure to see her so happy and careless, and then I thought he had his moments of recompense also. When he goes about with her he forgets all that worry—thank goodness for that; and certainly she is high-spirited enough for anything; you would think she had never known a care or a trouble in all her existence; and I suppose that's about the truth."

John Shortlands had grown quite eloquent about Yolande—although, indeed, he was not much of an orator in the House; and his companion listened in silence—in a profound reverie, in fact. At last he said, slowly—

"I suppose there is no necessity that I should know why the girl has been kept in ignorance of her mother's existence?"

"Oh, I will tell you the story—miserable as it is. Well, it is a sad story, too: for you cannot imagine a pleasanter creature than that was when Winterbourne married her. He was older

than she was, but not much ; he looks a good deal older now than he really is—those years have told on him. It was neuralgia that began it ; she suffered horribly. Then some idiot advised her to drink port wine—I suppose the very worst thing she could have tried, for if it is bad for gout, it must be bad for rheumatism and neuralgia, and such things ; at least I should think so. However, it soothed her at first, I suppose ; and no doubt she took refuge in it whenever a bad attack came on. But, mind you, it was not that that played the mischief with her. She herself became aware that she was being tempted to take too much ; for quite suddenly she went to her husband, who had suspected nothing of the kind, told him frankly that the habit was growing on her, and declared her resolution to break the thing off at once. She did that. I firmly believe she did keep her resolution to the letter. But then the poor wretch had worse and worse agony to bear ; and then it was that somebody or other—it wasn't Winterbourne, and he knew nothing about it—recommended her to try one of those patent medicines they make up from opium or morphia. I daresay it was harmless at first. No doubt she began with small doses. But it seems that those drugs are twenty times worse than brandy or whisky in destroying the power of the will ; and so I suppose the poor creature went on and on, increasing the doses and destroying her brain at the same time, until in the end she was simply a hopeless drunkard. It seems miraculous how women can go on destroying themselves with those infernal drugs without being found out. I don't know whether Winterbourne would ever have found it out ; for he is an indulgent sort of chap, and he was very fond of her ; but one night there was a scene at dinner. Then he discovered the whole thing. The child was sent away, for fear of further scenes ; and this so terrified the mother that she made the most solemn promises never to touch the poison again. But by this time—here is the mischief of those infernal things—her power of self-control had gone. Man alive, I can't tell you what Winterbourne had to go through. His patience with her was superhuman ; and always the promise held out to her was that Yolande was to be restored to her ; and sometimes she succeeded so well that every one was hopeful, and she seemed to have quite recovered. Then again there would be

another relapse ; and a wild struggle to conceal it from the friends of the family ; and all the rest of it. What a life he has led all those years—trying to get her to live in some safe retreat or other ; and then suddenly finding that she had broken out again, and gone to some people, Romneys or Romfords, the name is, who have a most pernicious influence over her, and can do anything with her when she is in that semi-maudlin state. Of course they use her to extort money from Winterbourne ; and she has drugged half her wits away ; and it is easy for them to persuade her that she has been ill-treated about Yolande. Then she will go down to the House, or hunt him out at his lodgings—oh, I assure you I can't tell you what has been going on all these years. There is only one fortunate thing—that the Romfords are not aware of the terror in which he lives of Yolande getting to know the truth, or else they would put the screw on a good deal more forcibly, I reckon. As for her, poor woman, she has no idea of asking for money for herself—in fact, she has plenty. It is not a question of money with Winterbourne. His dread is that she might stumble on them accidentally, and Yolande have to be told. That is why he has consented to her remaining all these years in France, though his only delight is in her society. That is why he won't let her live in London, but would rather put himself to any inconvenience by her living elsewhere. That is why he looks forward with very fair composure to a separation ; Yolande living in peace and quiet in this neighbourhood here ; and he left in London to take his chance of a stone being thrown through his window at any hour of the day or night !”

“ But that terrorism is perfectly frightful !——”

“ How are you to avoid it ?” said Shortlands, coolly. “ There is the one way, of course. There is the heroic remedy. Tell Yolande the whole story ; and then, the next time the stone is thrown, summon the police, give the woman in charge, bind her over in recognisances, and have all your names in the next day's paper. Some men could do that. Winterbourne couldn't ; he hasn't the nerve.”

The answer to that was a strange one. It was a remark, or rather an exclamation, that Melville seemed to make almost to himself.

"My God, not one of them appears to see what ought to be done!"

But the remark was overheard.

"What would you do, then?"

"I?" said Melville—and John Shortlands did not observe that the refined, intellectual face of his companion grew a shade paler as he spoke: "I? I would go straight to the girl herself, and I would say: 'That is the condition in which your mother is: go and save her'!"

"Then let me tell you this, Mr. Melville," said Shortlands, quite as warmly, "rather than bring such shame and horror and suffering on his daughter, George Winterbourne would cut off his fingers one by one. Why, man, you don't understand what that girl is to him—his very life! Besides, everything has been tried. You don't suppose the mother would have been allowed to sink to that state without every human effort being made to save her; and always Yolande herself held out to her as the future reward. Now we must be getting back, I think. But I wish you would think over what I have told you; and let Winterbourne have your opinion as to whether all this should be declared to your friend Leslie. Winterbourne's first idea was that, if Yolande were married and settled in the country—especially in such a remote neighbourhood as this—there would be no need to tell even her husband about it. It could not concern them. But now he is worrying himself to death about other possibilities. Supposing something disagreeable were to happen in London, and the family name get into the paper, then Yolande's husband might turn round and ask why it had been concealed from him. That might be unpleasant, you know. If he were not considerate, he might put the blame on her. The fact is, Winterbourne has had his nervous system so pulled to pieces by all this fear and secrecy and anxiety that he exaggerates things tremendously and keeps speculating on dangers never likely to occur. Why, he can't shoot half as well as he used to; he is always imagining something is going to happen; and he does not take half his chances just for fear of missing and being mortified after. He has not had a pleasant time of it these many years."

They turned now, and leisurely made their way back to

the lodge. The red sunset still flared up the glen ; but now it was behind them ; and it was a soft warm colour that they saw spreading over the heather slopes of the hills, and the wooded corries, and the little plateau between the convergent streams.

"May I ask your own opinion, Mr. Shortlands?" said Melville, after a time, "as to whether this thing should be kept back from Leslie?"

"Well, I should say that would depend pretty much on his character," was the answer ; "and as to that I know very little. My own inclination would be for having a frank disclosure all round ; but still I see what Winterbourne has to say for himself ; and I cannot imagine how the existence of this poor woman could concern either your friend Leslie or his wife. Probably they would never hear a word of her. She can't live long. She must have destroyed her constitution completely—poor wretch, one can't help pitying her ; and at the same time, you know, it would be a great relief if she were dead, both to herself and her relatives. Of course, if Mr. Leslie were a finical sort of person—I am talking in absolute confidence you know, and in ignorance as well—he might make some objection ; but if he were a man with a good sound base of character, he would say, 'Well, what does that matter to me?' and he would have some consideration for what Winterbourne has gone through in order to keep this trouble concealed from the girl, and would himself be as willing to conceal it from her."

"Don't you think," said Melville, after a minute's pause, "that the mere fact that he might make some objection is a reason why he should be informed at once?"

"Is he an ass?" said John Shortlands, bluntly. "Is he a worrying sort of creature?"

"Oh, not at all. He is remarkably sensible—very sensible. He will take a perfectly calm view of the situation ; you may depend on that."

"Other things being equal, I am for his being told—most distinctly. If he has common sense, there need be no trouble. On the other hand, you know, if you should think we are making a fuss where none is necessary, I have a notion that Winterbourne would be satisfied by your judgment, as an intimate friend of Leslie's."

"But that is putting rather a serious responsibility on me. Supposing it is decided to say nothing about the matter, then I should be in the awkward position of knowing something affecting Leslie's domestic affairs of which he would be ignorant."

"Undoubtedly. I quite see that. But if you are afraid of accepting the responsibility, there's an easy way out of it. I will go and tell him myself, and have it over. I have already broken away from Winterbourne's shilly-shallying by speaking to you; he would never have done it; and he is worrying himself into his grave. He is a timid and sensitive fellow; he now thinks he should have told the Master, as he calls him, when he first proposed for Yolande; and perhaps it might have been better to do so; but I can see how he was probably well inclined to the match for various reasons, and anxious not to put any imaginary stumbling-block in the way. But now, if you were to go to him and say, 'Well, I have heard the whole story. It can't concern either Yolande or her future husband. Forget the whole thing; and don't worry any more about it,' I do believe he would recover his peace of mind, for he has confidence in your judgment."

"It would be rather a serious thing."

"I know it."

"I must take time to turn the matter over."

"Oh, certainly."

They had now reached the bridge, and, happening to look up, they saw that Yolande had come to the door of the lodge, and was standing there, and waving a handkerchief to them as a sign to make haste. And what a pretty picture she made as she stood there—the warm light from the west aglow upon the tall, English-looking figure clad in a light-hued costume, and giving colour to the fair, freckled face, and the ruddy-gold aureole of her hair. Melville's eyes lighted up with pleasure at the very sight of her; it was but natural—she was like a vision.

"Ah," said she, shaking her finger at them as they went up the path, "you are wicked men. Seven minutes late already; and if the two-pounder that Mr. Melville brought for me has fallen all to pieces you must have yourselves to blame—that is true."

"I wish, Miss Winterbourne," said Jack Melville, "that

some noble creature would give me a day's salmon-fishing. Then I could bring you something better than loch trout."

"Oh no," she answered, imperiously, "I will not have anything said against the loch trout. No; I am sure there is nothing ever so good as what you get from your own place—nothing. Papa says that never, never did he have such cutlets as those from the roedeer that he shot last week."

"I can tell you, Miss Yolande," said John Shortlands, "that others beside your father fully appreciated those cutlets. The whole thing depends on whether you have got a smart young housekeeper; and I have it in my head now that I am going to spend the rest of my days at Allt-nam-ba; and I will engage you—on your own terms—name them—you shall have the money down—and then I will have Duncan compose a march for me—why should it be always *Melville's Welcome Home*?"

"But you are also to have the *Barren Rocks of Aden* to-night," said she, brightly. "I told Duncan it was your favourite. Now, come along—come along—oh, dear me! it is ten minutes late!"

Jack Melville was rather silent that night at dinner. And always—when he could make perfectly certain that her eyes were cast down—or turned in the direction of John Shortlands or of her father—he was studying Yolande's face; and sometimes he would recall the phrase that Mrs. Bell had used on the first occasion she had seen this young lady, or rather immediately after parting with her—"She's a braw lass, that; I fear she will make some man's heart sore"—and then again he kept wondering and speculating as to what possible strength of will and womanly character there might lie behind those fair, soft, girlish features.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PEACEMAKER.

PRETTY Mrs. Graham was standing in her room at Inverstroy, ready to go out; her husband was in the adjacent dressing-room, engaged in the operation of shaving.

"You need not be afraid, Jim," said the young matron.

"Everything has been arranged. Everything will go quite right till I come back. And Archie is to meet me at Fort Augustus, so that the ponies won't have the long pull up Glendoe."

"Why can't he manage his own affairs?" the stout warrior grumbled.

"Aunt Colquhoun isn't easy to get on with," she said. "And I am beginning to feel anxious. What would you say to his getting spiteful, and running away with *Shena Vân*?"

"Stuff!"

"Oh, I don't know. If I chose I could show you something I cut out of the *Inverness Courier* about three years ago. Well, I will show it to you."

She went to a drawer in her wardrobe, and hunted about for a time until she found the newspaper cutting, which she brought back and put before him on the dressing-table. This was what he took up and read:—

FOR SHENA'S NEW YEAR'S DAY MORNING.

*"Her eyes are dark and soft and blue,
She's light-stepped as the roe;
O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!*

*I wish that I were by the rills
Above the Allt-cam-bân;
And wandering with me o'er the hills,
My own dear Shena Vân.*

*Far other sights and scenes I view:
The year goes out in snow;
O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!"*

"Well," said he, contemptuously throwing down again the piece of paper, "you don't suppose Archie wrote that rubbish? That isn't his line."

"It's a line that most lads take at a certain age," said Mrs. Graham, shrewdly.

"More likely some moon-struck ploughboy!" her husband interjected; for, indeed, he did not seem to think much of those verses, which she regarded with some fondness.

"I am afraid," said she, looking at the lines, "that the

ploughboys in this part of the world don't know quite as much English as all that comes to. And how many people do you think now, Jim, have ever heard of the Allt-cam-bân? And then *Shena*—how many people have ever heard of Janet Stewart's nickname? There is another thing. Those verses appeared when Archie was at Edinburgh; and of course he knew very well that, although he was not allowed to write to her, the *Inverness Courier* would make its way into the manse. I think they are very pretty.

*"O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!"*

That is the worst of marrying an old man. *They* never write poetry about you."

"You call that poetry!" he said.

"Well, good-bye, Jim. I will tell Mackenzie when he is to meet me at Fort Augustus."

"Bring back Yolande Winterbourne with you," said Colonel Graham, who had now about finished his toilette.

"How can I, without asking her father? And there wouldn't be room."

"I don't want her father. I want her. There is no fun in having a whole houseful of married women."

"I quite agree with you. And who wanted them? Certainly not I. There is only one thing more absurd than having nothing but married women in the house, and that is having nothing but married men. But you have had a warning this year, Jim. Everybody acknowledges that there never was such bad shooting. I hope another year you will get one or two younger men who know what shooting is, and who can climb. Well, good-bye, Jim." And presently pretty Mrs. Graham was seated in a light little waggonette of polished oak, the reins in her hand, and a pair of stout little ponies trotting away down through the wooded and winding deeps of Glenstroy.

It was a long drive to Fort Augustus; and although from time to time a refrain went echoing through her head—

*"O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go!"*

and apparently connecting itself somehow with the pattering

of the horses' feet on the road, still her brain was far from being idle. This expedition was entirely of her own proper choice and motion. In truth she had been alarmed by the very fact that the Master of Lynn had ceased to wish for her interference. He had refused to urge his case further. If the people at Lynn Towers were blind to their own interests they might remain so. He was not going to argue and stir up domestic dissension. He would not allow Yolande's name to be drawn into any such brawl; and certainly he would not suffer any discussion of herself or her merits. All this Mrs. Graham gathered vaguely from one or two letters; and, as she considered the situation as being obviously dangerous, she had, at great inconvenience to herself, left her house full of guests, and was now about to see what could be done at Lynn Towers.

When she reached Fort Augustus Archie Leslie was waiting for her there at the hotel; and she found him in the same mood. He did not wish to have anything said about the matter. He professed to be indifferent. He assumed that his sister had come on an ordinary filial visit, and he had luncheon ready for her. He said she was looking prettier than ever, and was anxious to know whether they had done well with the shooting at Inverstroy.

"Now look here, Archie," said she, when the waiter had finally left the room. "Let us understand each other. You know what I have come about—at some trouble to myself. There is no use in your making the thing more difficult than needs be. And you know perfectly well that matters cannot remain as they are."

"I know perfectly well that matters cannot remain as they are," he repeated, with some touch of irony; "for this excellent reason, that in the course of time the Winterbournes will be going south, and that as Mr. Winterbourne has never been within the doors of Lynn Towers, and isn't likely to be, he will draw his own conclusions. Probably he has done so already. I haven't seen much of him since his friend Shortlands came. Very likely he already understands why our family have taken no notice of them; and I know he is too proud a man to allow his daughter to be mixed up in any domestic squabble. They will go south. That will be—Good-bye."

"But, my dear Master," his sister protested, "if you would only show a little conciliation——"

"What!" he said, indignantly. "Do you think I am going to beg for an invitation for Mr. Winterbourne? Do you expect me to go and ask that Yolande should be received at Lynn Towers? I think not! I don't quite see my way to that yet!"

"You needn't be angry——"

"But it is so absurd," he exclaimed. "What have Winterbourne's politics to do with Yolande? Supposing he wanted to blow up the House of Lords with dynamite, what has that got to do with her? It is Burke's *Peerage* that is at the bottom of all this nonsense. If every blessed copy of that book were burned out of the world, they wouldn't have another word to say. It is the fear of seeing 'daughter of Mr. Winterbourne, M.P. for Slagpool,' that is setting them crazy. That comes of living out of the world—that comes of being toadied by gillies and town councillors. But I am not going to trouble about it," said he, with a sudden air of indifference. "I am not going to make a fuss. They can go their way; I can go mine."

"Yes, and the Winterbournes will go theirs," said his sister, sharply.

"Very well."

"But it is not very well—it is very ill. Come now, Archie, be reasonable. You know the trouble I had before I married Jim; it was got over by a little patience and discretion."

"Oh, if you think I am going to cringe and crawl about for their consent, you are quite mistaken. I would not put Yolande Winterbourne into such a position. Why," said he, with some sense of injury in his tone, "I like the way they talk—as if they were asked to sacrifice something! If there is any sacrifice in the case it seems to me that I am making it, not they. I am doing what I think best for Lynn, that has always been starved for want of money. Very well; if they don't like it they can leave it alone. I am not going to beg for any favour in the matter."

"It might be as well not to talk of any sacrifice," said his sister, quietly, and yet with some significance. "I don't think there will be much sacrifice. Well, now I'm ready, Archie; what have you brought—the dog-cart?"

“Yes.”

Shortly thereafter they set out for Lynn ; and they did not resume this conversation ; for as they had to climb the steep road leading into Glendoe, the Master got down and walked, leaving the reins to his sister. They passed through the deep woods, and up and out on to the open heights. They skirted the solitary little lake that lies in a mountain-cup up there. And then, in due time, they came in sight of the inland country—a broad and variegated plain, with here and there a farmhouse or village.

They came in sight of something else, too—the figure of a young woman who was coming along the road. Mrs. Graham’s eyes were fixed on that solitary person for some time before she exclaimed—

“Archie, do you see who that is?”

“Of course I do,” said he, not with the best grace.

“It is she, isn’t it?” she said, eagerly.

“I suppose you can see that for yourself,” was the answer.

“Perhaps it isn’t the first time to-day that you have met her?” said she, looking up with a queer scrutiny.

“If you want to know, I have not set eyes on her since last Christmas. She has been living in Inverness.”

He pulled up. This young lady whom they now stopped to speak to was a good-looking girl of about twenty, with light brown hair and very dark blue eyes. There was some firmness and shrewdness of character in the face, despite the shyness that was also very visible there. For the rest, she was neatly dressed—in something of a town style.

She merely nodded to the Master, who took off his hat ; but, as she was on Mrs. Graham’s side of the dog-cart, she shook hands with that lady ; and her bright, fresh-coloured, upturned face had something of diffidence or self-consciousness in it.

“Oh, how do you do, Miss Stewart ! It is such a long time since I have seen you,” said Mrs. Graham.

“You do not come often to Lynn now, Mrs. Graham,” said Miss Stewart, with just a touch of a very pretty accent, “and I have been living in Inverness.”

“Oh, indeed. And how are the people at the manse?”

They chatted in the ordinary fashion for a few minutes ;

and then the Master of Lynn drove on again—in silence. Mrs. Graham ventured to repeat—apparently to herself, though he must have overheard—

*“And wandering with me o’er the hills
My own dear Shena Vàn ;”*

but if he did overhear, he took no notice ; and certainly he betrayed neither confusion nor annoyance. Perhaps the verses were not his after all ? The minister’s daughter was the belle of those parts ; she had had many admirers ; and the *Inverness Courier* was the natural medium for the expression of their woes. Still, Mrs. Graham asked herself how many people in the world knew of the existence of the Allt-cam-bân, far away in the solitudes over Allt-nam-ba.

Mrs. Graham, as it turned out, had a terrible time of it with her father. This short, thickset man with the voluminous brown and gray beard, shaggy eyebrows, and bald head surmounted by a black velvet skull-cap, was simply furious ; and so far from being affected in any degree by his daughter’s blandishments, he seemed inclined to direct his wrath upon her as the chief aider and abettor of her brother’s high treason. Nor was his lordship’s language marked by much gentleness or reticence.

“The idea,” he exclaimed, “that Dochfour, and Lochiel, and Culloden, and the rest of them, might have to rub shoulders with a low, scoundrelly Radical ! the mere chance of such a thing happening is monstrous !”

“I beg to remind you, papa,” said Mrs. Graham, with her face grown a little pale, “that my husband is not in the habit of associating with low scoundrels of any kind. And I would rather not hear such things said about the father of my particular friend.

Then she saw that that line would not do.

“Papa,” she pleaded, “a little civility costs nothing. Why should you not call ? You must have known it was this Mr. Winterbourne who had taken the shooting when we telegraphed you from Malta.”

“I must have known ? I did know ! What has that to do with it ? I do not let my friendship with my shootings. What my tenant may be is nothing to me, so long as he can pay ; and he is welcome to everything he can find on the

shooting : but it does not follow he is entitled to sit down at my table, or that I should sit down at his."

"But you were very kind to Yolande Winterbourne when she came up at first, and you knew whose daughter she was," pretty Mrs. Graham pleaded again.

"I did not know that that young jackass proposed to make her one of the family—it is too great an honour altogether!"

"You know, papa, it is such a pity to make trouble when it is not likely to help. Archie can marry whom he pleases——"

"Let him, and welcome!" said this fierce old gentleman. "He can marry whom he pleases; but he cannot compel me to associate with his wife's father."

She went away somewhat crestfallen, and sought out the Master, whom she found in one of the greenhouses.

"Well," said he, with a smile—for he had anticipated the result.

"His lordship does seem opinionated about it," she had to confess. "And yet I think I could talk him over, if only Aunt Colquhoun were absent. I suppose she will be back from Foyers by dinner-time."

"I wish she were sewn in a sack, and at the bottom of Loch Ness," said he.

"Archie, for shame! You see," she added, thoughtfully, "I must get back to Fort Augustus by four to-morrow afternoon. And I haven't come all this way without being resolved to see Yolande before I go. That leaves me little time. But still——have you asked Mr. Melville to speak to papa?"

"No. Jack Melville and I nearly quarrelled over it; so I dropped the subject. He doesn't understand matters, don't you know, Polly; he doesn't understand what the improvement of a poor estate costs. He has forgotten his Horace—*pennis non homini datis*—that means that human beings aren't born with enough money. He made quite a fuss when I showed him that there were prudential reasons for the match; as if there were any use in blinding one's eyes to obvious facts. Well, I don't care. I have done my best. My intentions towards Lynn were sincere and honourable; now they can make a hash of the whole thing if they like."

"It is folly speaking like that," his sister said, sharply. "Surely you have too much spirit to yield to a little opposition of this kind——"

"A little opposition!" he said, with a laugh. "It's about as bulky as Borlum Hill; and I for one am not going to ram my head against it. I prefer a quiet life."

"But you are bound in honour to Yolande Winterbourne not to let the engagement cease!" she cried. "Why, to think of such a thing! You ask a girl to marry you; she consents; and then you throw her over because this person or that person objects. Well, I never heard of one of the Leslies acting that way before! I was only a girl; but I showed them what stuff I was made of when they tried to interfere with me!"

"Oh, but that's different," he said, coolly. "Girls are romantic creatures. They rather like a shindy. Whereas men prefer a quiet life."

"Well, I never heard the like of that——"

"Wait a minute. I am going to talk to you plainly, Polly," said he. "I wanted to marry Janet Stewart; and I daresay she would have had me if I had definitely asked her——"

"I daresay she would!"

"Oh, you think she hasn't as much pride as anybody else because she is only a minister's daughter? That is all you know about her. However, they all made such a row, and you especially, that I consented to let the affair go. No doubt that was wise. I was young. She had no money; and Lynn wanted money. Very well. I made no objection. But you will observe, my dear Miss Polly, that when these stumbling-blocks are again and again put into the road, even the most patient of animals may begin to get fractious, and might even kick over the traces. At present I hope I am not in a rage. But I am older now than I was then; and not in the least bit inclined to be made a fool of."

"And do you really mean to say," said Mrs. Graham, with her pretty dark gray eyes regarding him with astonishment, "that you are deliberately prepared to jilt Yolande Winterbourne merely on account of this little difficulty?"

"It isn't my doing," said he. "Besides, they seem bent on piling up about three cart-loads of difficulty. Life isn't long enough to begin and shovel that away. And if they

don't want to have Corrievreak back, I daresay Sir John will be quite willing to keep it."

"I don't think I will speak to papa again until after dinner," said she, musingly. "Then I will have another try—with Corrievreak."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE AMBASSADOR.

Now Jack Melville—or Melville of Monaglen, as Mrs. Bell (with her own dark purposes always in view) proudly preferred to call him—had not only decided that the Master of Lynn should know that Yolande's mother was alive, but he had also undertaken himself to tell him all the facts of the case, to Mr. Winterbourne's great relief. Accordingly, one afternoon he gave the school-children a half-holiday and walked over to Lynn. He met the Master at the wooden bridge adjoining Lynn Towers; and also the dog-cart conveying Mrs. Graham back to Fort Augustus.

"There she goes," said Young Leslie, sardonically, as he regarded the disappearing vehicle. "She is a well-intentioned party. She thinks she can talk people over. She thinks that when people are in a temper they will listen to common sense. And she hasn't even now learned a lesson. She thinks she would have succeeded with more time; but of course she has to get back to Inverstry. And she still believes she would have had her own way, if she had had a day or two to spare."

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," said the other, carelessly. "Only his lordship in a fury at the idea of my marrying the daughter of a Radical. And of course it isn't the slightest use pointing out that Mr. Winterbourne's radicalism generally consists in opposing what is really a Radical Government. And it isn't the slightest use pointing out that politics don't run in the blood; and that Yolande has no more wish to destroy the British Constitution than I have. However, what is the consequence? They can fight it out amongst themselves."

But Melville did not seem inclined to treat the matter in

this off-hand way. His thoughtful face was more grave than was its wont. After a second or two he said—

“Look here, Archie ; I have got something to say to you ; will you walk along the strath a bit ?”

“You are going to try the loch ?” said the Master, observing that his companion had his fishing-rod under his arm.

“Yes, for an hour or so, if they are rising.”

“I will come and manage the boat for you, then,” said the other, good-naturedly.

“Then we can go on together to Allt-nam-ba. You are dining there, I suppose.”

“Well, no,” said young Leslie, with a trifle of embarrassment.

“But I was told I should meet you !”

“I was asked. Well, you see, the lodge is small ; and it isn’t fair to overcrowd it, and give Yolande so much more housekeeping trouble. Then Macpherson may come down from Inverness any afternoon, almost, to arrange about the Glendyerg march. We have come to a compromise about that ; anything is better than a law-suit ; and the gully just above the watcher’s bothy remains ours, which is the chief thing.”

But Melville was not to be put off ; he knew this young man.

“What is the real reason of your not going up to Allt-nam-ba this evening ?”

“Well, I will tell you if you want to know. The real reason is that my people have treated the Winterbournes badly ; and I am ashamed of it ; and I don’t want to go near the place more than I can help. If they imagine we are all very busy at Lynn that may be some excuse for neither my father nor my aunt having had the common civility to call at the lodge. But I am afraid Mr. Winterbourne suspects the true state of affairs ; and of course that puts me into rather a difficult position when I am at Allt-nam-ba ; and when you see a difficult position before you the best thing you can do is not to step into it.”

“And do you expect everything to be made smooth and comfortable for you ?” said Melville, almost angrily. “Don’t you expect to have any trouble at all in the world ? When

you meet the difficulties of life, is your only notion to turn away and run from them?"

"Yes; as fast as I can and as far as I can. Look here, Jack; different people have different views; it doesn't follow that you are right because you look at things not as I do. You think common sense contemptible; I think Quixotism contemptible: it cuts both ways, you see. I say distinctly that a man who accepts trouble when he can avoid it is an ass. I know there are lots of women who like woe; who relish it and revel in it. There are lots of women who enjoy nothing so much as a funeral; the blinds all down; a mysterious gloom in the rooms; and weeping relations fortifying themselves all day long against their grief by drinking glasses of muddy port-wine and eating buns. Well, I don't. I don't like woe. I believe in what a young Scotch fellow said to me one morning on board ship when we were on the way out—I think he was a bagman from Glasgow—at all events he came up to me with an air of profound conviction on his face and said: 'Man, it's a seeckening thing to be seeck!' Well, that is the honest way of looking at it. And although I am arguing not so much with you as with Polly, still I may as well say to you what I said to her when she wanted me to do this, that, and the other thing: 'No; if those people don't see it would be to their interest and to everybody's interest that this marriage should take place, they are welcome to their opinion. I shan't interfere. I don't mean to have any domestic squabble if I can help it. I prefer a quiet life.'"

By this time they had reached the boat, which they dragged down to the water and shoved off, the Master of Lynn good-naturedly taking the oars. It was a pleasant warm afternoon; and it looked a likely afternoon for fishing, besides; but it was in a very silent and absent fashion that Jack Melville put his rod together and began to look over his casts. This speech of the young Master's was no revelation to him; he had known all that before. But, coming in just at this moment, it seemed to make the task he had undertaken more and more difficult and dangerous; and, indeed, there flashed across his mind once or twice some wild doubt as to the wisdom of his decision, although that decision had not been arrived at without long and anxious consideration.

And it was in a very perfunctory way that he began to throw out the flies upon the water, insomuch that one or two rises he got he missed through carelessness in striking. In any case the trout were not rising freely ; and so at length he said—

“ Archie, would you mind rowing over to the other side ? One of the shepherds sent me word that the char have come there ; and Miss Winterbourne has never seen one. I only want one or two to show her what they are like ; I don’t suppose they will be worth cooking just now.”

“ But you have no bait.”

“ I can manage with the fly, I think.”

And so they rowed away across the pretty loch on this placid afternoon, the while Melville took off the cast he had been using, substituting three sea-trout flies of the most brilliant hues. Then, when they had got to the other side, Melville made for a part of the shore where the bank seemed to go very sheer down ; and then proceeded to throw the flies over a particular part of the water, allowing them slowly to sink. It was an odd sort of fly-fishing, if it could be described as fly-fishing at all. For after the cast had been allowed to sink some couple of yards or so, the flies were slowly and cautiously trailed along ; then there was a curious sensation as if an eel were swallowing something at the end of the line—very different from the quick snap of a trout—and then, as he carefully wound in the reel there appeared in the water a golden-yellow thing, not fighting for its life as a trout would, but slowly, oilily circling this way and that until a scoop of the small landing-net brought the lethargic, feebly flopping, but beautifully golden-and-red-spotted fish into the boat. When he had got the two that he wanted, he had done with that ; it was not sport. And then he sat down in the stern of the boat, and his rod was idle.

“ Archie,” said he, “ there is something better in you than you profess.”

“ Oh, come,” said the other, “ char-fishing isn’t exciting ; but it is better than a lecture.”

“ This is serious,” said the other, quietly ; “ you yourself will admit that when I tell you.”

And then, very cautiously at first, and rather in a round-about way, he told him the whole sad story ; begging him not

to interrupt until he had finished ; and trying to invoke the young man's pity and sympathy for what those people had suffered, and trying to put their action in a natural light, and trying to make clear their motives. Who was to blame—the indiscreet sister who had invented the story, or the foolishly affectionate father who could not confess the truth ? He would not say ; he would rather turn to consider what they had attempted and succeeded in securing—that the beautiful child-nature of this girl should grow up untainted with sorrow and humiliation and pain.

The Master of Lynn heard him patiently to the end, without any expression of surprise or any other emotion. Then he said—

“ I suppose, Jack, you have been asked to tell me all this ; most likely you are expected to take an answer. Well, my answer is clear. Nothing in the world would induce me to have anything to do with such a system, or conspiracy, or whatever it may be called. You may think the incurring of all this suffering is fine ; I think it is folly. But that is not the point. I am not going to judge them. I have to decide for myself ; and I tell you frankly I am not such a fool as to bring any skeleton into my cupboard. I don't want my steps dogged ; I don't want to have to look at the morning paper with fear. If I had married and found this out afterwards I should have said I had been grossly deceived ; and now, with my eyes open, I consider I should be behaving very badly towards my family if I let them in for the possibility of any scandal or disgrace——”

“ Why, man, how could there be any such thing !” Melville exclaimed ; but he was interrupted.

“ I let you have your say ; let me have mine. There is no use beating about the bush. I can have nothing to do with any such thing ; I am not going to run the risk of any public scandal while it can be avoided——”

“ What would you do, then, if you were in Winterbourne's position ?”

“ What would I do ? What I would not do would be to incur a life-long martyrdom all for a piece of sentimental folly !”

“ But what would you do ? I want to know what you would do !”

"I would lock the woman up in a lunatic asylum! Certainly I would. Why should such a system of terrorism be permitted! It is perfectly absurd."

"You cannot lock her up in a lunatic asylum unless she is a lunatic; and the poor creature does not seem to be that—not yet, at least——"

"I would lock her up in a police-cell, then!"

"And would that prevent exposure?"

"At all events, it would prevent her going down and lying in wait for him in Westminster Palace Yard. But that is not the point. It is not what I would do in his place; it is what I am going to do in my own. And that is clear enough. I have had enough bother about this business; I am not going to have any more. I am not going to have any secrets and mysteries. I am not going to submit to any terrorism. Before I marry Yolande Winterbourne, all that affair of that lunatic creature must be arranged; and arranged so that every one may know of it, without fear and trembling and dissimulation."

"The message is definite," said Melville, absently, as his companion took up the oars and began to row across to the other side of the loch.

It was characteristic of this man that he should now begin and try to look at this declaration from young Leslie's point of view, and endeavour to convince himself of its reasonableness; for he had a general wish to approve of people and their ways and opinions, having in the long run found that that was the most comfortable way of getting along in the world. And this that the Master had just said was, regarded from his own position, distinctly reasonable. There could be no doubt that Mr. Winterbourne had had his life perverted and tortured mainly through his trying to hide this secret from his daughter; and it was but natural that a young man should be unwilling to have his own life clouded over in like manner. Even John Shortlands had not sought to defend his friend when he told the story to Melville. As for himself—that is, Melville, well, he could not honestly approve of what Mr. Winterbourne had done—*except when he heard Yolande laugh.*

They rowed over to the other side in silence, and there got out.

"I hope I did not use any harsh terms, Jack," the younger man said. "But the thing must be made clear."

"I have been wondering," said the other, "whether it would not have been better if I had held my tongue. I don't see how either you or your wife could ever have heard of it."

"I think it would have been most dishonourable of you to have known that and to have kept it back from me."

"Oh you do?"

"Most distinctly I do!"

"There is some consolation in that. I thought I was perhaps acting the part of an idle busybody, who generally only succeeds in making mischief. And I have been wondering what is the state of the law. I really don't know. I don't know whether a magistrate would consider the consumption of those infernal drugs to be drunkenness; and I don't even know whether you can compulsorily keep in confinement one who is a confirmed drunkard."

"You may very well imagine that I don't want to have anything to do with police courts and police magistrates, or with lunatic asylums either, when I get married," said young Leslie, when they had pulled the boat up on the bank. "But this I am sure of, that you can always get sufficient protection from the law from annoyances of that sort, if you choose to appeal to it. On the other hand, if you don't,—if you try to shelter people from having their deserts,—if you go in for private and perfectly hopeless remedies,—then you have to stand the consequences. I declare to you that nothing would induce me to endure for even a week the anxiety that seems to have haunted Winterbourne for years and years."

"But then he is so desperately fond of Yolande, you see," Jack Melville said, with a glance.

Leslie flushed slightly.

"I think you are going too far."

"Oh, I hope not. I only stated a fact. Come, now, Archie," he said, in his usual friendly way, "call your common sense to you, that you are so proud of. You know I feel myself rather responsible. I don't want to think I have made any mischief——"

"You have made no mischief. I say you would have acted most dishonourably if you had kept this back."

"Well, now, take a rational view of the situation. No doubt you are vexed and annoyed by the opposition at home. That is natural. No one likes his relatives to object when he knows that he has the right and the power to choose for himself. But don't transfer your annoyance over that matter to this, which is quite different. Consider yourself married and living at Allt-nam-ba or at Lynn; how can the existence of this poor creature affect you in any way? And, moreover, the poor woman cannot live long——"

"She might live long enough to break some more windows, and get everybody's name into the paper," said he. "You don't suppose we should always be living in the Highlands?"

"I want you to come along with me now to the lodge; and you can say that after all you found you could come to dinner—there never were people so charmingly free from ceremony of any kind; and after dinner you will tell Mr. Winterbourne that certainly you yourself might not have been prepared to do what he has done, during these years, for Yolande's sake; and perhaps that you could not approve of it; but that for the short time likely to elapse you would be content also to keep silence; and you might even undertake to live in the Highlands until death should remove that poor creature and all possible source of annoyance. That would be a friendly, natural, human sort of thing to do; and he would be grateful to you. You owe him a little. He is giving you his only daughter; and you need not be afraid—he will make it easy for you to buy back Corrievreak and do all the other things you were speaking of. I think you might do that."

"Midsummer madness!" the other exclaimed, with some show of temper. "I can't imagine how you could expect such a thing. Our family is old enough to be haunted by a ghost, and we haven't started one yet; but when we do start one, it won't be a police court sort of ghost, I can assure you. It is hard luck enough when one of one's own relatives goes to the bad—I've seen that often enough in families; but voluntarily to take over some one else's relative who has gone to the bad, without even the common protection of the policeman and the magistrate—no, thanks!"

"Then that is your message, I suppose."

"Most distinctly. I am not going into any conspiracy of

secrecy and terrorism—certainly not. I told you that I liked a quiet life. I am not going to bother about other people's family affairs—assuredly I am not going to submit to any persecution, or any possibility of persecution, however remote, about them."

"Very well."

"Don't put it harshly. I wish to be reasonable. I say they have been unreasonable and foolish; and I don't want to involve myself in the consequences. When I marry, I surely must have, as every human being in the country has, the right to appeal to the law. I cannot have my mouth gagged by their absurd secrets."

"Very well."

"And I fancy," the Master of Lynn added, as his eye caught a figure that had just come in sight far away up the strath, "that that is Yolande Winterbourne herself. You need not say that I had seen her before I left——" and so he turned and walked away in the direction of Lynn Towers.

And was this indeed Yolande? Well, he would meet her with an unclouded face—for she was quick to observe; and all his talk would be about the golden char, and the beautiful afternoon, and the rubber of whist they sometimes had now after dinner. And yet he was thinking.

"I wonder if my way would do," he was saying to himself, as he still regarded that advancing figure. "Perhaps it is Quixotic, as Archie would say. Statistics are against me; and statistics are horribly sure things, but sometimes they don't apply to individual cases. Perhaps I have no business to interfere. No matter; this evening at least she shall go home to dinner with a light heart. She does not know that I am going to give her my *Linnæa borealis*."

The tall figure now advancing to him was undoubtedly that of Yolande, and he guessed that she was smiling. She had brought out for a run the dogs that had been left in the kennel; they were chasing all about the hillside and the road in front of her. The light of the sunset was on her face.

"Good evening, Miss Winterbourne," said he, when they met.

"But I am going to ask you to call me Yolande," said she, quite frankly and simply, as she turned to walk back with him to Allt-nam-ba, "for I have not many friends; and I like them all to call me Yolande."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WALK HOME.

"BUT was not that Mr. Leslie?" she said.

"Oh yes, it was," he answered, with an assumed air of indifference. "Yes. It is a pity he cannot dine with you this evening."

"But why did he not come along now, for a minute even, when he was so far?"

She certainly was surprised; and there was nothing for him but to adopt the somewhat lame excuses that the Master in the first instance had offered him.

"I think he is expecting a lawyer from Inverness," said he, rather quickly slurring over the various statements, "and if he came by the afternoon boat he would be due just about now. They have a good deal of business on hand just now at Lynn——"

"Yes, apparently that is true," she said, with rather a singular gesture—very slight, but significant. "We have not seen anything of them."

"Well, you see," he continued, in the most careless and cheerful way, "no doubt they know your father is occupied with the shooting, and you with your amateur housekeeping—which I am told is perfect. Mr. Shortlands says the lodge is beautifully managed."

"Ah, does he?" said she, with a quick flush of genuine pleasure. "I am glad to hear that. And it is very simple now—oh, yes, for they are all so diligent and punctual. And now I have more and more time for my botany; and I am beginning to understand a little more of the arrangement, and it is interesting."

"I consider you have done very well," said he. "So well that you deserve a reward."

"Ah, a prize?" said she, with a laugh. "Do you give prizes at your school? Well now—let me see—what shall I choose? A box of chocolates!"

"Did they allow you to choose your own prizes at Château Cold Floors? We don't do that here. No; the reward I

have in store for you is the only specimen I have got of the *Linnæa borealis*—the only plant that bears the name of the great master himself, and such a beautiful plant, too ! I don't think you are likely to find it about here. I got mine at Clova ; but you can get everything at Clova."

"It is so kind of you," she said ; "but what am I to do with it?"

"Start a herbarium. You ought to have plenty of time ; if not, get up an hour earlier. You have a fine chance here of getting the Alpine species. I have got some fresh boards and drying paper down from Inverness ; and I meant to lend you my hand-press ; but then I thought I might want it myself for some other purpose ; and as Mrs. Bell was glad to have the chance of presenting you with one, I said she might ; it will be down from Inverness to-morrow."

"But I cannot accept so much kindness——" she was about to protest, when he interrupted her.

"You must," he said, simply. "When people are inclined to be civil and kind to you, you have no right to snub them."

Suddenly she stopped short and faced him. There was a kind of mischief in her eyes.

"Will you have the same answer," she asked, slowly, and with her eyes fixed on him, "when Mrs. Bell presents to you Monaglen?"

Despite himself a flush came over the pale, handsome features.

"That is absurd," said he, quickly. "That is impossible. I know the Master jokes about it. If Mrs. Bell has any wild dreams of the kind——"

"If she has," Yolande said, gravely, "if she wishes to be civil and kind, you have no right to snub her."

"You have caught me, I confess it," he said, with a good-natured laugh, as they resumed their walk along the wide strath. "But let us get back to the sphere of practical politics."

He then proceeded to give her instructions about the formation of a herbarium ; and in this desultory conversation she managed very plainly to intimate to him that she would not have permitted him to take so much trouble had this new pursuit of hers been a mere holiday amusement. No ; she

hoped to make something more serious of it ; and would it not be an admirable occupation for her when she finally came to live in these wilds, where occupations were not abundant ? And he (with his mind distraught by all sorts of anxieties) had to listen to her placidly talking about her future life there, as if that were to be all very plain sailing indeed. She knew of no trouble ; and she was not the one to anticipate trouble. Her chief regret at present was that her botanising (at least so far as the collection of plants was concerned) would cease in the winter.

“ But you cannot live up here in the winter ! ” he exclaimed.

“ Why not ? ”

“ You would be snowed up ! ”

“ Could anything be more delightful than that ? ” she said.

“ Oh, I see it all before me—like a Christmas picture. Big red fires in the rooms ; outside the sunlight on the snow ; the air cold and clear ; and papa going away over the hard sparkling hills to shoot the ptarmigan and the white hares. Don’t you know, then, that papa will take Allt-nam-ba for all the year round when I come to live here ? And if Duncan the keeper can live very well in the bothy, why not we in the lodge ? Oh, I assure you it will be ravishing——”

“ No, no, no ; you could not attempt such a thing,” he said. “ Why, the strath might be quite impassable with the snow. You might be cut off from the rest of the world for a fortnight or three weeks. You would starve.”

“ Perhaps, then, you never heard of tinned meats ? ” she said, with an air of superiority.

“ No, no ; the people about here don’t do like that. Of course, in the winter, you would naturally go in to Inverness, or go south to Edinburgh, or perhaps have a house in London——”

“ Oh no, that is what my papa would never, never permit—anything but London.”

“ Well, then, Inverness is a pleasant and cheerful town. And I must say this for the Master, that he is not at all likely to prove an absentee landlord when his turn comes. He is quite as diligent as his father in looking after the estate ; there won’t be any reversal of policy when he succeeds, as sometimes happens.”

"Inverness?" said she, wistfully. "Yes; perhaps Inverness—perhaps here—that is what my papa would prefer; but London—ah no. And sometimes I think he is so sadly mistaken about me—it is his great affection, I know—but he thinks if I were in London I would hear too much of the attacks they make on him, and I might read the stupidities they put into the newspapers about him. He is so afraid of my being annoyed—oh, I know, for himself he does not care—it is all me, me—and the trouble he will take to watch against small annoyances that might happen to me, it is terrible and pitiable, only it is so kind. Why should I not go to the House of Commons? Do they think I care about their stupidities? I know they are angry because they have one man among them who will not be the slave of any party—who will not be a—a cipher? is it?—in a crowd—an atom in a majority—no, but who wishes to speak what he thinks is true."

"Oh, but, Yolande," said he (venturing thus to address her for the first time), "I want you to tell me: do you ever feel annoyed and vexed when you see any attack on your father?"

She hesitated; she did not like to confess.

"It is a natural thing to be annoyed when you see stupidities of malice and spitefulness," she said, at length—with the fair freckled face a shade warmer in colour than usual.

"For I can give you a panacea for all such wounds; or rather an absolute shield against them."

"Can you—can you?" she said, eagerly.

"Oh yes," he said, in that carelessly indifferent way of his. "When you see anybody pitching into your father, in the House or in a newspaper, all you have to do is to recall a certain sonnet of Milton's. You should bear it about with you in your mind; there is a fine wholesome tone of contempt in it; and neither persons in public life nor their relatives should have too great a respect for other people's opinions. It is not wholesome. It begets sensitiveness. You should always consider that your opponents are—are——"

"*Ames de boue!*" said Yolande, fiercely. "That is what I think when I see what they say of my papa."

“But I don’t think you would feel so much indignation as that if you would carry about this sonnet with you in your memory :

‘I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
By the known rules of ancient liberty,
When straight a barbarous noise environs me
Of owls, and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs ;
As when those hinds that were transformed to frogs
Railed at Latona’s twin-born progeny,
Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
But this is got by casting pearls to hogs,
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
And still revolt when Truth would set them free.
License they mean when they cry Liberty ;
For who loves that must first be wise and good :
But from that mark how far they rove we see,
For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.’

There is a good, honest, satisfactory, wholesome contempt in it.”

“Yes, yes ; will you write it down for me ?” said she, quickly and gratefully. “Will you write it down for me when we get to the lodge ?”

“If you like.”

When they drew near to the lodge, however, they found that something very unusual was going forward. The whole of the women-servants, to begin with, were outside, and gazing intently in the direction of a hillside just above the confluence of the Dun Water and the Crooked Water ; while the pretty Highland cook was asserting something or other in strenuous terms. The moment they saw Yolande those young people fled into the house, like so many scurrying rabbits ; but Sandy, the groom, being over near the kennel, did not hear, and remained perched up on the fence, using an opera-glass which he had filched from the dining-room mantelpiece. Yolande went over to him (as she had to kennel up the dogs in any case), and said to him—

“What is the matter, Sandy ?”

He very nearly dropped with fright, but instantly recovered himself, and said, with great excitement—

“I think they are bringing home a stag, madam ; I am sure that is it. I was seeing the powny taken down to cross

the burn ; and it was not the panniers that was on him ; and there is the chentlemen standing by the bridge, looking."

There certainly was a small group of figures standing on the farther side of that distant bridge—a slim, little structure slung on wires, and so given to oscillation that only one person could cross at a time. This performance, indeed, was now carefully going on ; but what had become of the pony ? Presently they saw something appear on the top of the bank on this side of the stream.

"It is a stag, undoubtedly, Yolande," Jack Melville said (he had got hold of the opera-glass), "and I should say a good one. Now, how could that have come about ? Never mind, I daresay your father will be delighted enough ; and I should say Duncan will tune up his pipes this evening."

Yolande looked through the glass, and was very much excited to see that small pony coming home with its heavy burden ; but the gentlemen were now invisible, having passed behind a hillock. And so she sped into the house, fearful that the curiosity of the women-servants might have let affairs get behindhand, and determined that everything should be in readiness for the home-coming sportsmen.

Melville was left outside ; and as he regarded, now the gillie leading the pony, and now the party of people who were visible coming over the hillock, it was not altogether of the dead stag that he was thinking. In this matter of the Master of Lynn he had only performed his thankless duty as messenger, as it were ; still, it was not pleasant to have to bring back bad news. Sometimes he wished he had had nothing whatever to do with the whole complication ; then, again, he reminded himself that that secret had been confided to him by John Shortlands unsolicited ; and that he, Melville, had subsequently done what he honestly thought best. And then he turned to think about Yolande. Would he grudge anything he could do for that beautiful child-nature—to keep it clear and bright and peaceful ? No, he could not. And then he thought, with something of a sigh, that those who were the lucky ones in this world did not seem to place much value on the prizes that lay within their hand's reach.

The corpulent John Shortlands, as he now came proudly along, puffed and blowing and breathless, clearly showed by his

radiant face who had shot the stag ; and at once he plunged into an account of the affair for the benefit of Jack Melville. He roundly averred that no such "fluke" was known in English history. They were not out after any stag. No stag had any right to be there. They had passed up that way in the morning, with the dogs. Nor could this have been the wounded stag that the shepherds had seen drinking out of the Allt-corrie-an-Eich some four days ago. No ; this must have been some wandering stag that had got startled out of some adjacent forest, and had taken refuge in the glen just as the shooting-party were coming back from the far tops. Duncan had proposed to have a try for a few black game when they came down to these woods ; and so, by great good luck, John Shortlands had put a No. 4 cartridge in his left barrel, just in case an old black-cock should get up wild. Then he was standing at his post when suddenly he heard a pattering ; a brown animal appeared with head high and horns thrown back ; the next instant it passed him, not more than fifteen yards off, and he blazed at it—in his nervousness with the right barrel ; then he saw it stumble, only for a second ; then on it went again, he after it, down to the burn, which fortunately was rushing red with the last night's rain ; in the bed of the stream it stumbled again and fell ; and as it struggled out and up the opposite bank, there being now nothing but the breadth of the burn between him and it, he took more deliberate aim, fired, and the stag fell back, stone dead, its head and horns, indeed, remaining partly in the water.

Then Mr. Winterbourne, when he came along, seemed quite as honestly pleased at this unexpected achievement as if the stag had fallen to his own gun ; while as for Duncan, the grim satisfaction on his face was sufficient testimony.

"This is something like a good day's work," said he. "And I was bringing down the stag for Miss Winterbourne to see it, before the dark ; and now Peter will take back the powny for the panniers."

But Jack Melville took occasion to say to him, aside—

"Duncan, Miss Winterbourne will look at the head and horns when you have had time to take a sponge or a wet cloth to them, don't you understand ?—later on in the evening, perhaps."

"Very well, sir. And I suppose the gentlemen will be sending in the head to Mr. Macleay's to-morrow? It is not a royal, but it is a very good head whatever."

"How many points—ten?"

"Yes, sir. It is a very good head whatever."

Yolande had so effectively hurried up everything inside the lodge, that when the gentlemen appeared for dinner it was they, and not the dinner, who were late. And of course she was greatly delighted also; and all the story of the capture of the stag had to be described over again, to the minutest points. And again there was a fierce discussion as to who should have the head and horns, John Shortlands being finally compelled to receive the trophy which naturally belonged to him. Then a wild skirl outside in the dark.

"What is that, now?" said John Shortlands.

"That," said Yolande, complacently—for she had got to know something of these matters—"is the Pibroch of Donald Dhu."

"That is the Pibroch of Donald Black, I suppose," said John Shortlands, peevishly. "What the mischief have I to do with Donald Black? I want the Pibroch of John Shortlands. What is the use of killing a stag if you have to have somebody else's pibroch played? If ever I rent a deer-forest in the Highlands, I will have my own pibroch made for me, if I pay twenty pounds for it."

Indeed, as it turned out, there was so much joy diffused throughout this household by the slaying of the stag, that Jack Melville, communing with himself, decided that his ill news might keep. He would take some other opportunity of telling Shortlands the results of his mission. Why destroy his very obvious satisfaction? It was a new experience for him; he had never shot a stag before. The cup of his happiness was full to the brim; and nobody grudged it him, for he was a sound-hearted sort of man.

One rather awkward incident arose, however, out of this stag episode. In the midst of their dinner-talk Yolande suddenly said—

"Papa, ought I to send a haunch of venison to Lynn Towers? It seems so strange to have neighbours, and not any compliment one way or the other. Should I send a haunch of venison to Lord Lynn?"

Her father seemed somewhat disturbed.

"No, no, Yolande ; it would seem absurd to send a haunch of venison to a man who has a deer-forest of his own."

"But it is let."

"Yes, I know ; but no doubt the tenant will send in a haunch to the Towers if there is any occasion——"

"But I know he does not, for Archie said so. Mr. Melville," she said, shifting the ground of her appeal, "would it not be a nice compliment to pay to a neighbour? Is it not customary?"

His eyes had been fixed on the table ; he did not raise them.

"I—I don't think I would," said he, with some little embarrassment. "You don't know what fancies old people might take. And you will want the venison for yourselves. Besides, Mr. Shortlands shot the stag ; you should let him have a haunch to send to his friends in the South."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes, certainly!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Why did I not think of it? That will be much better."

At another time John Shortlands might have protested ; but something in Melville's manner struck them, and he did not contend that the haunch of venison should be sent to Lynn Towers.

After dinner they went out into the dark, and, guided by the sound of the pipes, made their way to the spacious coach-house, which they found had been cleared out, and in which they found two of the gillies and two of the shepherds—great, huge, red-bearded, brawny men—dancing a four-some reel, while Duncan was playing as if he meant to send the roof off. The head and horns of the deer were hung up on one of the pillars of the loose-box. The place was ruddily lit up by two lamps, as well as a few candles ; there was a small keg of whisky in a dim corner. And Yolande thought that the Highland girls might just as well come over from the lodge (the English Jane was of no use), and very soon the dancing-party was made much more picturesque. But where was the Master of Lynn, with the torchlight dance he had promised them on the occasion of their killing their first stag?

When Jack Melville was going away that night he was

surprised to find the dog-cart outside, Sandy in his livery, the lamps lit, and warm rugs on the front seat.

"This is not for me?" he said.

"It is indeed," said Yolande.

"Oh, but I must ask you to send it back. It is nothing for me to walk to Gress. You have enough work for your horses just now."

"The night is dark," she said, "and I wish you to drive—you will have the light of the lamps."

"Why should I drive to Gress?" he said.

"But I wish it," she answered.

And that was enough.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DANGER.

It might have appeared to any careful observer, who also knew all the circumstances of the case, that what was now happening, or about to happen, away up in those remote solitudes, was obvious enough; but certainly no suspicion of any such possibilities had so far entered the minds of the parties chiefly interested. Yolande regarded her future as already quite settled. That was over and done with. Her French training had taught her to acquiesce in any arrangement that seemed most suitable to those who hitherto had guided her destiny; and as she had never experienced any affection stronger than her love for her father, so she did not perceive the absence of any such passion. To English eyes her marriage might seem a *mariage de complaisance*, as Colonel Graham had styled it; in her eyes it seemed everything that was natural and proper and fitting; and she was quite content. It never occurred to her to analyse the singular satisfaction she always felt in the society of this new friend—the sense of safety, trust, guidance, and reliance with which he inspired her. He claimed a sort of schoolmasterish authority over her; and she yielded—sometimes, it is true, reasserting her independence by the use of feminine wiles and coquetries which were as natural as the scamperings of a young rabbit or the rustling of the leaves of

a tree ; but more ordinarily submitting to his dictation and government with a placid and amused sense of security. While, as for him, had he dreamed that he was stealing away the affections of his friend's chosen bride, he would have fled from the spot on the instant, with shame and ignominy haunting him. But how could such an idea present itself to him ? He looked on her as one already set apart. She belonged to the Master of Lynn : as his friend's future wife he hoped she also would be his friend. He admired her bright spirits, her cheerfulness and frankness ; but it was this very frankness (added to his own blunt disregard of conventionalities) that was deceiving them both. Five minutes after she had asked him to call her Yolande, she was talking to him of her future home and her married life ; and she was as ready to take his advice in that direction as in the direction of drying plants and setting up an herbarium. And if sometimes she reversed their relations, and took to lecturing him on his unwise ways at Gress—his carelessness about his meals, and so forth—why, then he humoured her, and considered her remonstrances as only an exhibition of friendly interest, perhaps with a trifle of gratitude added, for he knew very well that he had spent a good deal of time in trying to be of service to her.

Then, at this particular moment, everything seemed to conspire towards that end which neither of them foresaw. Yolande found the domestic arrangements at Allt-nam-ba flow very easily and smoothly, so that practically she had the bulk of the day at her own disposal ; and Gress was a convenient halting-place when she went for a drive, even when she had no particular message or object in view. But very frequently she had a distinct object in view which led to her sending on the dog-cart to Foyers and awaiting its return. On the very morning, for example, after Jack Melville had dined with them, she got the following letter, which had been brought out from Whitebridge late the night before. The letter was from Mrs. Bell ; and the handwriting was singularly clear and precise for a woman now over sixty, who had for the most part educated herself.

“ Gress, Wednesday.

“ MY DEAR YOUNG LADY—Excuse my forwardness in sending you a letter ; but I thought you would like to hear the

good news. The lawyers write to me from Edinburgh that young Mr. Fraser is now come of age, and that the trustees are now willing to sell the Monaglen estate, if they can get enough for it. This is what I have looked forward to for many's the day; but we must not be too eager like; the lawyers are such keen bodies, and I have not saved up my scraps to feed their pigs. I think I would like to go to Edinburgh myself, if it was not that they lasses would let everything go to rack and ruin, and would have no sense to study Mr. Melville's ways; the like of them for glaiket hussies is not in the land. But I would greatly wish to see you, dear young lady, if you will honour me so far, before I go to Edinburgh; for I cannot speak to Mr. Melville about it; and I do not wish to go among they lawyers with only my own head to guide me.—I am, your humble servant,

CHRISTINA BELL."

Yolande laughed when she got this letter, partly with pure joy over the great good fortune which was likely to befall her friend, and partly at the humour of the notion that she should be consulted about the conveyancing of an estate. However, she lost no time in making her preparations for driving down to Gress; and indeed the dog-cart had already been ordered, to take some game into Foyers, and also the stag's head destined for Mr. Macleay. Yolande saw that everything was right; got a brace of grouse and a hare for Mrs. Bell; and then set out to drive away down the strath—on this changing, gloomy, and windy day that had streaked the troubled surface of the loch with long white lines of foam.

She found Mrs. Bell much excited, but still scarcely daring to talk above a whisper; while from time to time she glanced at the laboratory, as if she feared Mr. Melville would come out to surprise them in the discussion of this dark secret.

"He is not in the schoolhouse, then?" Yolande said.

"Not the now. You see, the young lad Dalrymple that he got from Glasgow College is doing very well now; and Mr. Melville is getting to be more and more his own maister. He canna aye be looking after they bairns; and if we could get Monaglen for him, who would expect him to bother his head about a school? He's done enough for the folk about here;

he'll have to do something for himself now—ah, Miss Winterbourne, that will be a prood day for me when I hand him over the papers.”

She spoke as if it were a conspiracy between these two.

“But it will be a sair, sair job to get him to take the place,” she continued, reflectively, “for the man has little common sense; but he has pride enough to move mountains.”

“Not common sense?” said Yolande, with her eyes showing her wonder. “What has he, then? I think it is always common sense with him. When you are talking with him, and not very sure what to do, whatever he says is always clear, straight, and right; you have no difficulty; he sees just the right way before you. But how am I to help you, Mrs. Bell?”

“Well, I dinna ken, exactly; but the idea of an auld woman like me going away to Edinburgh among a’ they lawyers is just dreadfu’. It’s like Daniel being put into the den of lions.”

“Well, you know, Mrs. Bell,” Yolande said, cheerfully, “no harm was done to him. The lions did not touch a hair of his head.”

“Ay, I ken that,” said Mrs. Bell, grimly; “but they dinna work miracles nowadays.”

“Surely you must have your own lawyers?” the girl asked.

“I have that.”

“You can trust them, then; with them you are safe enough, surely?”

“Well, this is the way o’t,” said Mrs. Bell, with decision. “It is not in the nature o’ things for a human being to trust a lawyer—it’s no possible. But the needcessity o’ the case drives ye into their hands, and ye can only trust in Providence that they will make the other side suffer, and no you. They’re bound to make their money out o’ somebody. I’m no saying, ye ken, but that the lawyers that have been doing business for ye for a nummer o’ years might no be a bit fairer; for it’s their interest to carry ye on, and be freens wi’ ye; but, dear me, when I think of going away to Edinburgh, a’ by mysel’, among that pack o’ wolves, it’s enough to keep one frae sleeping at nights.”

“But every one says you are so shrewd, Mrs. Bell!”

“Do they?” she responded, with a pleased laugh. “Just because I kenned what they men were after? It needed no much judgment to make that out. Maybe if I had been a young lass, they could ha’ persuaded me; but when I was a young lass, with scarcely a bawbee in my stocking, there was never a word o’t; and when they did begin to come about, when I was an auld woman, I kenned fine it was my bank-book they were after. It didna take much judgment to make that out—the idiwuts! Ay, and my lord, too—set him up with his eight months in London by himsel’; and me finding him the money to put saut in his kail. Well, here am I bletherin’ about a lot o’ havers like that, as if I was a young lass out at the herdin’; when I wanted to tell ye, my dear young leddy, just how everything was. Ye see, what I was left was, first of a’, the whole of the place in Leicestershire, and a beautifu’ countryside it is, and a braw big house, too, though it was not likely I was going to live there, in a state not becoming to one like me, and me wanting to be among my own people besides. Then there was some money in Consols, which is as safe as the Bank, as the saying is; and some shares in a mine in Cornwall. The shares I was advised to sell, and I did that, for I am not one that cares for risk; but when I began to get possession of my yearly money, and when I found that what I could save was mounting up and mounting up in jist an extraordinary way, I put some o’ that into French stock, as I thought I might take a bit liberty wi’ what was my own making in a measure. And now, though it’s no for me to boast, it’s a braw sum—a braw sum; and atweel I’m thinking that a fine rich English estate, even by itsel’, should be able to buy up a wheen bare hillsides in Inverness-shire, even if we have to take the sheep ower at a valuation—ay, and leave a pretty penny besides. I declare, when I think o’ what might ha’ happened, I feel I should go down on my knees and thank the Almichty for putting enough sense in my head to see what they men were after; or by this time there might not be stick or stone to show for it—a’ squandered away in horse-racing or the like—and Mr. Melville, the son of my auld master, the best master that ever lived, going about from one great man’s house to another, teaching the young gentlemen, and him as fit as any o’ them to have house and ha’ of his ain——”

She stopped suddenly ; for both of them now saw through the parlour window Jack Melville himself come out of his laboratory, carelessly whistling. Doubtless he did not know that Yolande was in the house, else he would have walked thither ; and probably he had only come out to get a breath of fresh air, for he went to a rocking-chair close by the garden, and threw himself into it, lying back with his hands behind his head. Indeed, he looked the very incarnation of indolence—this big-boned, massive-shouldered young man, who lay there idly scanning the skies.

“ I am going out to scold him for laziness,” said Yolande.

“ Please no, my dear young leddy,” Mrs. Bell said, laying her hand gently on the girl’s arm. “ It is now he is working.”

“ Working ! Does it look like it ? Besides, I am not so afraid of him as you are, Mrs. Bell. Oh yes, let me go.”

So she went out and through the little lobby into the garden ; coming upon him, indeed, quite unawares.

“ Mrs. Bell says I must not speak to you,” she said. “ She says you are working, and must not be disturbed. Is it so ? And what is the work ? Is it travelling at 68,000 miles an hour ? ”

“ Something like that,” said he ; and he forgot to rise, while she remained standing. Then he glanced round the threatening sky again. “ You were brave to venture out on a morning like this.”

“ Why ? What is there ? ”

“ Looks like the beginning of a storm,” said he. “ Here we are fairly sheltered ; but there are some squalls of wind going across. I hope you won’t all be blown down the strath into the loch to-night.”

“ Ah, but I do not believe any longer in weather prophecies,” she said, tauntingly. “ No. I do not think any one has any knowledge of it—at Allt-nam-ba, at all events. It is never five minutes the same. One moment you are in the clouds ; the next—in sunlight ! Duncan looks up the hill in the morning, and is very serious ; before they have got to the little bridge, there is blue sky ! It is all chance. Do you think science can tell you anything ? You, now, when you brought that instrument”—and here she regarded a solar machine, the mirrors and brass mountings of which were

shining clear even on this dull day—"did you expect to get enough sunlight at Gress for you to distil water?"

A twinkle in the clear gray eyes showed that she had caught him.

"There are mysteries in science that cannot be explained to babes," said he (and she thought it rather cool that he remained sitting, or rather lounging, instead of going and fetching a chair for her). "Everything isn't as easy as snipping out the name of a genus and pasting it at the foot of a double sheet of white paper."

"That is good of you to remind me," she said, without in the least being crushed. "One thing I came for to-day was the *Linnæa borealis*."

Then he instantly jumped to his feet.

"Certainly," said he; "come along into the house. You may as well take back the boards, and drying paper, and so forth, with you; and I will show you how to use them now. There may be a few other things you should have out of my herbarium, just to start you, as it were—not rare plants, but plants you are not likely to get up at Allt-nam-ba. Are you superstitious? I will give you a four-leaved clover, if you like."

"Did you find it?"

"Yes—in a marshy place in Glencoe."

"But it is the finder to whom it brings luck, as I have read," Yolande said.

"Oh, is it so?" he answered, carelessly. "I am not learned in such things. If you like you can have it; and in the meantime we will start you with your *Linnæa* and a few other things. I don't suppose the hand-press has arrived yet; but mind, you must not refuse it."

"Oh no," said she, gravely repeating the lesson of yesterday. "When one wishes to be civil and kind to you, you have no right to snub him."

The repetition of the phrase seemed to remind him; he suddenly stopped short, regarding her with an odd, half-amused look in his eyes.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I hope so."

"Well, now," he said, rather under his voice, "I am going

to tell you a secret, which on no account must you tell to Mrs. Bell. I have just heard, on very good authority, that Monaglen is about to come into the market, after all."

"Oh, indeed," said she, with perfectly innocent eyes. "Can it be possible!"

"Don't mention the thing to Mrs. Bell; for you know her wild schemes and visions; and it would only make her unhappy."

"Why, then?"

"Because what she means to do (if she really means to do it) is not practicable," he said, plainly. "Of course, if she buys Monaglen for herself, good and well. She is welcome to sit in the hall of my fathers. I daresay she will do more good in the neighbourhood than they ever thought of doing, for she is an excellent kind of creature. And it is just possible that, seeing me about the place, she may have thought of some romantic project; but when once I am clear away from Gress, it will quite naturally and easily fade from her mind."

"But you are not going away!" she said. And that sudden sinking of the heart ought to have warned her; but, indeed, she had not had a wide experience in such matters.

"Oh yes," said he, good-naturedly. "How could this makeshift last? Of course, I must be off—but not this minute or to-morrow. I have started a lot of things in this neighbourhood—with Mrs. Bell's money, mind—and I want to see them going smoothly; then I'm off."

She did not speak. Her eyes were distant; she was scarcely conscious that her heart was so disappointed and heavy. But she was vaguely aware that the life she had been looking forward to in these far solitudes did not seem half so full and rich now. There was some loneliness about it—a vacancy that the mind discerned but did not know how to fill up. Was it the gloom of the day? She thought of Allt-namba in the winter; it had no longer any charm for her. There was no mischief in her brain now, no pretended innocence in her eyes. Something had befallen—she scarcely knew what. And when she followed him into the house, to get the *Linnæa borealis*, that little pathetic droop of the mouth was marked.

That same afternoon, as she was driving home, and just above the little hill that goes down to the bridge adjacent to

Lynn Towers, she met the Master, who was coming along on horseback. The drive had been a sombre one, somehow ; for the skies were gloomy and threatening. But when she saw him she brightened up, and gave him a very pleasant greeting.

"You are quite a stranger," said she, as they both stopped.

"We have had a good many things to attend to at the Towers," he said—as she thought, rather distantly.

"I hear them talking of having a hare drive some day soon—away at a great distance, at the highest parts. You will come and help them, I suppose?"

"I think I must go in to Inverness ; and I may have to be there for some days."

"You will come and see us before you go, then?" she inquired—but rather puzzled by the strangeness, almost stiffness, of his manner.

"I hope so," said he. "I am glad to see you looking so well. I hear they have been having good sport at Allt-nam-ba. Well, I must not detain you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"—and she drove on, wondering. He had not even asked how her father was. But perhaps these business affairs were weighing on his mind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GALE.

As night fell the storm that Jack Melville had foreseen began to moan along the upper reaches of the hills ; and from time to time smart torrents of rain came rattling down, until the roar of the confluent streams out there in the dark sounded ominously enough. All through the night, too, the fury of the gale steadily increased ; the gusts of wind sweeping down the gorge shook the small building (although solidly built of stone) to its very foundations ; and even the fierce howling of the hurricane was as nothing to the thunder of the now swollen waters, that seemed to threaten to carry away the whole place before them. Sleep was scarcely possible to the inmates of this remote little lodge ; they knew not what might not happen

up in this weather-brewing caldron of a place ; and at last, after an anxious night, and towards the blurred gray of the morning, they must have thought their worst fears were about to be realised, for suddenly there was a terrific crash, as if part of the building had given way. Almost instantly every bedroom door was opened ; clearly no one had been asleep. And then, through a white cloud of dust, they began to make out what had happened ; and although that was merely the falling in of part of the ceiling of the hall, of course they did not know how much more was likely to come down, and Mr. Winterbourne called to Yolande, sternly forbidding her to stir. John Shortlands was the first to venture out ; and through the cloud of plaster-dust he began to make his examinations, furnished with a long broom-handle that he obtained from one of the frightened maids.

“It is all right,” he said. “There are one or two other pieces that must come down ; then the rest will be safe. Yolande, you can go back to bed. What? Well, then, go back and shut your door anyway, until I get Duncan and the gillies to shovel this stuff away. Don’t come out until I tell you.”

John Shortlands then went downstairs, got a cap, and opened the hall-door. The spectacle outside was certainly enough to deter any but the bravest. There was no rain ; but the raging hurricane seemed to fill the atmosphere with a gray mist ; while from time to time a gust would sweep down into the bed of the stream, tear the water there into a white smoke, and then whirl that up the opposite hillside until it was dissolved in the general vapour. But these waterspouts, he quickly perceived, were only formed down there in the opener stretches of the strath, where the gusts could get freely at the bed of the stream ; up here at Allt-nam-ba there was nothing but the violence of the wind that came in successive shocks against the lodge, shaking it as if it were in the grip of a vice.

He ventured out. His first experience was to find his deer-stalking cap, which he greatly prized, whirled from off his head, and sent flying away in the direction of the Allt-cam-bân. But he was not to be daunted. He went indoors again and got another ; and then, going out and putting his

bullet head and his splendid bulk against the wind he fairly butted his way across to the bothy.

He found Duncan trying to put up some boards where a window had been blown in ; and an angry man was he when he learnt from Mr. Shortlands what had happened at the lodge.

"The Master will give it him !" he said, savagely.

"Whom ?"

"The plasterer from Inverness, sir. I was telling him it was no use mending and mending ; but that it was a whole new ceiling that was wanted, after such a wild winter as the last winter. The Master will be very angry. The young lady might have been hurt."

"The young lady might have been hurt !" said John Shortlands, ironically. "Yes, I should think so, if she happened to have been passing. But in this part of the country, Duncan, is it only women who are hurt when the ceiling of a house falls on them ? The men don't mind ?"

Duncan was quite impervious to irony, however. He went away to get Sandy and the rest of them to help him in shovelling off the plaster—going out, indeed, into this raging tempest in his shirt-sleeves and with a bare head, just as if nothing at all unusual were happening.

Of course, with the inhabitants of the lodge there was no thought of stirring out that day. They built up the fires in the little dining and drawing rooms, and took to books, or the arrangement of flies, or the watching at the window how the gale was still playing its cantrips—tearing at the scant vegetation of the place, and occasionally scooping up one of those vaporous waterspouts from the bed of the stream. Then Yolande managed to do a little bit of household adornment—with some audible grumbling.

"Dear me," she said, standing at the dining-room fire, "did ever any one see two such untidy persons ? There is a fine row of ornaments for a mantel-shelf. I wonder what Madame would say. Let us see : first, some cartridges—why are they not in the bag ? Second, a dog-whistle. Third, some casting-lines. Fourth, a fly-book—well, I will make a little order by putting the casting-lines in the book——"

"Let them alone, Yolande," her father said, sharply. "You will only make confusion."

She put them in, nevertheless; and continued her enumeration.

"Fifth, some rifle-cartridges; and if one were to fall in the fire, what then? Sixth, the stoppers of a fishing-rod. Now, the carelessness of it! Why does not Duncan take your rod to pieces, Mr. Shortlands, and put in the stoppers? I know where he keeps it, outside the bothy, just over the windows; and think now how it must have been shaken last night. Think of the varnish!"

"I believe you're right, Yolande," said he; "but it saves a heap of trouble."

"Seventh, a little silver fish in a box—a deceitful little beast all covered with hooks. Eighth, a flask, with whisky or some horrid-smelling stuff in it: ah, Madame, what would you think? Then a telescope—well, that is something better—that is something better——*allons*, we will go and look at the storm."

Looking out of the window was clearly impracticable, for the panes were blurred; but she went to the hall-door, opened it, and directed the glass down the valley. She was quite alone; the others were busy with their books. Then suddenly she called to them—

"Come, come! There is some one that I can see—oh! imagine any one fighting against such a storm! A stranger? Perhaps a friend from England? Ah, such a day to arrive! Or perhaps a shepherd?—no, there are no dogs with him——"

Well, the appearance of a human being on any day, let alone such a day as this, in this upland strath, was an event; and instantly they were all at the door. They could not make him out; much less could they guess on what errand any one, stranger or friend, should be willing to venture himself against such a gale. But that figure away down there kept making headway against the wind. They could see how his form was bent—his head projecting forward. He was not a shepherd: as Yolande had observed, he had no dogs with him. He was not the Master of Lynn; that figure belonged to a bigger man than the Master.

"I'll tell you who it is," said John Shortlands, curtly. "It's Jack Melville. Three to one on it."

"Oh, the folly—the folly!" Yolande exclaimed, in quite real distress. "He will be blown over a rock——"

"Not a bit of it!" said John Shortlands, to comfort her. "The people about here don't think anything of a squall like this. Look at Duncan there—marching down to dig some potatoes for the cook. A head-keeper in the south wouldn't be as good-natured as that, I warrant you. They are much too swell gentlemen there."

And it was Jack Melville, after all. He was very much blown when he arrived, but he soon recovered breath, and proceeded to say that he had been afraid that the gale might catch the boat and do some mischief.

"And it has," said he. "It is blown right over to the other side; and apparently jammed between some rocks. So I have come along to get Donald and one of the gillies to go with me; and we will have it hauled clear up on the land——"

"Indeed, no!" Yolande protested, with pleading in her face. "Oh no!—on such a day why should you go out? come in and stay with us! What is a boat, then——"

"But," said he, with a sort of laugh, "I am afraid I am partly responsible for it. I was the last that used the boat——"

"Never mind it," said she; "what is it—a boat! No, you must not go through the storm again."

"Oh, but we are familiar with these things up here," said he, good-naturedly. "If you really mean to invite me in, I will come—after Donald and I have gone down to the loch."

"Will you?" she said, with her bright face full of welcome and gladness.

"I must come back with my report, you know," said he. "For I am afraid she may have got knocked about; and if there is any damage I must make it good——"

"Nonsense!" Mr. Winterbourne interrupted.

"Oh, but I must. It is Lord Lynn's boat; and there are people from whom one is not quick to accept an obligation. But then there are other people," said he, turning to Yolande, "from whom you can receive any number of favours with great pleasure; and if you don't mind my staying to lunch with you—if I may invite myself to stay so long——"

“Do you think I would have allowed you to go away before?” she said, with a touch of pride in her tone; she had got to know something of Highland ways and customs.

So he and Donald and two others went away down the glen; and in about a couple of hours came back with the report that the boat was now placed in a secure position; but that it had had two planks stove in, and would have to be sent to Inverness for repair—Jack Melville insisting on taking over that responsibility on his own shoulders, although, as a matter of fact, the Master of Lynn had assisted him in dragging the boat up on the last occasion on which it had been used. As for Yolande, she did not care for any trumpery boat: was it not enough that their friend should have come to keep them company on this wild and solitary day? Then there was another thing. She had determined to astonish the gentlemen with the novelty of a hot luncheon; and here was another who would see what the little household could do! indeed, it was a banquet. Her father drew pointed attention to the various things (though he was himself far enough from being a gourmand). A venison pasty John Shortlands declared to have been the finest dish he had encountered for many a day. He wished to heavens they could make a salad like that at the Abercorn Club.

“Is it not nice to see them so grateful?” said she, turning with one of her brightest smiles to the stranger guest. “The poor things! No wonder they are pleased. The other day I climbed away up the hill to surprise them at their lunch—oh, you cannot imagine the miserableness of it! Duncan told me where I should find them. The day was so dull and cold; the clouds low down; and before I was near the top, a rainy drizzle began——”

“They generally say a drizzling rain in English,” her father said.

“But we are not in England. It is a rainy drizzle in the Highlands, is it not, Mr. Melville?”

“It does not matter how you take it,” he answered; “but we get plenty of it.”

“Then the cold wet all around; and the heather wet; and I went on and on—not a voice—not a sign of any one. Then a dog came running to me—that was Bella—and I said to

myself, 'Aha, I have found you now!' Then we went on; and at last—the spectacle!—the poor people all crouched down in a peat-hag, hiding from the rain; papa seated on a game-bag that he had put on a stone; Mr. Shortlands on another; their coat-collars up; the plates on their knees; the knives, forks, cold beef, and bread, all wet with the rain—oh, such a picture of miserableness has never been seen. Do you wonder that they are grateful, then—do you wonder they approve—when they have a fire, and a warm room, and dry plates, and dry knives and forks?"

Indeed, they had a very pleasant meal; and the coffee and cigars after it lasted a long time; for of what good was anything but laziness so long as the wind howled and roared without? All the time, however, Jack Melville was wondering how he could have a few minutes' private talk with Mr. Shortlands; and as that seemed to be becoming less and less probable—for Mr. Winterbourne seemed content to have an idle day there in his easy-chair by the fire, and Yolande was seated on the hearthrug at his knees, quite content to be idle too—he had to adopt a somewhat wild pretext. John Shortlands was describing the newest variety of hammerless gun; then he spoke of the one he himself had bought just before coming north. Melville pretended a great interest. Was it in the bothy? Yes. Might they not run over for a couple of minutes? Yolande protested; but John Shortlands assented; so these two ventured out together to fight their way across.

Instead of going into the central apartment of the bothy, however, where the guns stood on a rack, Melville turned into the next apartment, which was untenanted, and which happened to be warm enough, for Duncan had just been preparing porridge for the dogs, and a blazing fire still burned under the boiler.

"I wanted to say a word to you."

"I guessed as much. What's your news?"

"Well, not very good," said Jack Melville, rather gloomily. "and I don't like to be the bearer of bad news. I meant to tell you the other evening; and I could not do it somehow."

"Oh, out with it, man! never fear. I like to hear the worst, and then hit it on the head with a hammer, if I can.

There would have been none of this trouble if I had had my way from the beginning—however, that's neither here nor there."

"I am afraid I am the bearer of an ultimatum," Melville said.

"Well?"

It was clear that Melville did not like this office at all. He kept walking up and down the earthen floor, though the space was limited enough—his brows contracted—his eyes bent on the ground.

"It is awkward for me," he said, rather impatiently. "I wish I had had nothing to do with it. But you cannot call me an intermeddler; for you yourself put this thing on me; and—and—well, it is not my business either to justify or condemn my friend—I can only tell you that I considered it was safest and wisest he should know the true state of affairs—if I have erred in that, well——"

"I don't think you have," said Shortlands, slowly. "I left it open to your decision—to your knowledge of this young fellow. But I think my decision would, in any case, have been the same."

"Very well. I think I put the whole matter fairly to him. I told him that he had practically no risk to run of any annoyance; and that the cause of all this trouble, poor wretch, would soon be out of the way; and then I told him what Mr. Winterbourne had gone through for the sake of his daughter. Well, he did not seem to see it that way. He was quite frank. He said it was a mistaken Quixotism that had been at the bottom of it all——"

"I said so, too; but still——"

"It is a matter of opinion; it is of no immediate consequence," Melville said. "But what he seemed quite resolved on was that he would not consent to become a party to this secrecy. He says everything must be met and faced. There must be no concealment; in short, Yolande must be told the whole story, so that, in case of any further annoyance, there should be no dread of her discovering it, but only the simple remedy of appealing to a constable."

John Shortlands considered for a minute or two.

"I don't know that he isn't quite right," he said, slowly.

"Yes, I imagine his position is a fair one. At one time I said the same. I can look at it from his point of view. I think we must admit, as men of the world, that he is perfectly in the right; but," and here he spoke a little more quickly, "I can't help speaking what is on my mind; and I say that, if you think of what Winterbourne has done for this girl, this ultimatum, if you call it so—from the fellow who pretends to be her sweetheart, from the fellow who wants her for a wife—well, I call it a damned shabby thing!"

Melville's face flushed.

"I am not his judge," he said, coldly.

"I beg your pardon," John Shortlands said—for his anger was of short duration. "I ought to have remembered that this young Leslie is your friend, as Winterbourne is mine. I beg your pardon—I can do no more."

"Yes, you can," said Melville, in the same measured way. "I wish you distinctly to understand that I express no opinion whatsoever on Mr. Leslie's decision; and I must ask you to remember that I certainly cannot be supposed to approve of it simply because I am a messenger."

"Quite so—quite so—I quite understand," John Shortlands said. "The least said the easiest mended. Let's see what is to be done. I suppose there was no doubt in his mind—no hesitation?"

"None."

"It would be no good trying to talk him over?"

"I, for one, will not attempt it. No, his message was distinct. I think you may take it as final. Perhaps I ought to add that he may have been influenced by the fact that his people at the Towers seem to have been quarrelling with him about this marriage; and he has not the best of tempers at times; and I think he feels injured. However, that is not part of my message. My message was distinct, as I say. It was, in fact, an ultimatum."

"Poor Winterbourne," John Shortlands said, absently. "I wonder what he will look like when I tell him. All his labour and care and anxiety gone for nothing. I suppose I must tell him; there must be an explanation; I daresay that young fellow won't come near the Lodge now until there is an understanding. Winterbourne will scarcely believe me. Poor devil

—all his care and anxiety gone for nothing! I don't mind about her so much. She has pluck; she'll face it. But Winterbourne—I wonder what his face will look like to-night when I tell him."

"Well, I have done my best and my worst, I suppose, however it turns out," said Jack Melville, after a second or two. "And now I will bid you good-bye."

"But you are going into the house?"

"No."

"No?" said the other, in astonishment. "You'll bid them good-bye; I suppose?"

"I cannot!" said Melville, turning himself away in a manner. "Why, to look at that girl—and to think of the man she is going to marry having no more regard for her than to——"

But he suddenly recalled himself: this was certainly not maintaining his attitude of impartiality.

"Yes," said he, "I suppose I must go in to bid them good-bye."

They were loth to let him depart; Mr. Winterbourne, indeed, wishing him to remain for dinner and stay the night. But they could not prevail on him; and soon he was making his way with his long strides down the glen, the gale now assisting instead of impeding his progress. John Shortlands (who was apt to form sudden and rather violent prepossessions and prejudices) was looking after him, as the tall figure grew more and more distant.

"There goes a man," he was saying to himself; "and I wish to heavens he would kick that hound!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

SURMISES.

THE gale was followed by heavy rain; there was no going out the next day. But, indeed, it was not of shooting that those two men were thinking.

"He might have spared her—he might have spared her!" was Mr. Winterbourne's piteous cry, as he sat in his friend's

room, and gazed out through the streaming window-panes on the dismal landscape beyond.

And who was to tell her? Who was to bring grief and humiliation on that fair young life? Who was to rob her of the beautiful dream and vision that her mother had always been to her? Not he for one. He could not do it.

And then (for he was a nervous, apprehensive man, always ready to conjure up distressing possibilities) might she not misunderstand all this that had been done to keep her in ignorance? Might she not be angry at having all her life been surrounded by an atmosphere of concealment? If she were to mistake the reason of her father's having stooped to subterfuge and deceit? Was Yolande going to despise him, then—she, the only being in the world whose opinion he cared for? And always his speculations, and fears, and anxious conjectures came back to this one point—

“He might have spared her—he might have spared her.”

“Now, look here, Winterbourne,” John Shortlands said, in his plain-spoken way. “If I were you, before I would say a word of this story to Yolande, I would make sure that that would be sufficient for him. I don't know. I am not sure. He says that Yolande must be told; but will that suffice? Is that all he wants? If I were in your place, I would have a clear understanding. Do you know, I can't help thinking there is something behind all this that hasn't come out. If this young fellow is really in earnest about Yolande—if he is really fond of her—I don't think he would put this stumbling-block in the way—I don't think he would exact this sacrifice from you—unless there was some other reason. Yesterday afternoon Melville said as little as he could. He didn't like the job. But he hinted something about a disagreement between young Leslie and his family over this marriage.”

“I guessed as much,” said Mr. Winterbourne. “Yes, I have suspected it for some time. Otherwise I suppose his father and aunt would have called on Yolande. They know each other. Yolande stayed a night at the Towers when Mrs. Graham first brought her here—until the Lodge was got ready.”

“Of course, if the fellow has any pluck, he won't let that stand in his way. In the meantime, a domestic row isn't pleasant; and I daresay he is impatient and angry. Why

should he revenge himself on Yolande, one might ask. But that is not the fair way of putting it. I can see one explanation. I didn't see it yesterday; and the fact was I got pretty wild when I learned how matters stood; and my own impression was that kicking was a sight too good for him. I have been thinking over it since, though; the rain last night kept me awake. And now I can understand his saying, 'Well, I mean to marry in spite of them; but I will take care, before I marry, to guard against any risk of their being able to taunt me afterwards.' And then, no doubt, he may have had some sort of notion that when there was no more concealment, when every one knew how matters stood, some steps might be taken to prevent the recurrence of—of—you know. Well, there is something in that. I don't see that the young fellow is so unreasonable."

Mr. Winterbourne was scarcely listening; his eyes looked haggard and wretched.

"When I took this shooting," he said, absently, "when the place was described to me, on the voyage out, I thought to myself that surely there Yolande and I would be safe from all anxiety and trouble. And then again, up the Nile, day after day I used to think of her being married and settled in this remote place, and used to say to myself that then, at least, everything would be right. And here we are, face to face with more trouble than ever!"

"Nonsense, man, nonsense!" John Shortlands said, cheerfully. "You exaggerate things. I thought this mountain-work would have given you a better nerve. Everything will be right—in time. Do you expect the young people never to have any trouble at all? I tell you everything will be right in time. You pull up your courage; there is nothing so dreadful about it; and the end is certain—wedding-bells, old slippers, speeches, and a thundering headache the next morning, after confectioner's champagne."

The haggard eyes did not respond.

"And who is to tell her? The shock will be terrible—it may kill her."

"Nonsense—nonsense! Whoever is to tell her, it must not be you. You would make such a fuss; you would make it far more desperate than it is. Why, you might frighten her

into declaring that she would not marry—that she would not ask her husband to run the risk of some public scandal. That would be a pretty state of affairs—and not unlikely on the part of a proud-spirited girl like that. No, no; whoever tells her must put the matter in its proper light. It is nothing so very desperate. It will turn out all right. And you for one should be very glad that the Master, as you call him, now knows the whole story; for after the marriage, whatever happens, he cannot come back on you and say you had deceived him.

“After the marriage! And what sort of a happy life is Yolande likely to lead when his relatives object to her already?”

“There you are off again! More difficulties! Why, man, these things must be taken as they come. You don’t know that they object—and I don’t believe they can object to her, though the old gentleman mayn’t quite like the colour of your politics. But supposing they do, what’s the odds? They can’t interfere. You will settle enough on Yolande to let the young couple live comfortably enough, until the old gentleman and his sister arrive at common sense—or the churchyard. I don’t see any difficulty about it. If only those people were to marry whose friends and relatives on both sides approved, you might just as well cut the Marriage Service out of the Prayer-book at once.”

This was all that was said at the time; and it must be admitted that it left Mr. Winterbourne pretty much in the same mood of anxious perturbation. His careworn face instantly attracted Yolande’s notice; and she asked him what was the matter. He answered that there was nothing the matter—except the dulness of the day, perhaps; and for the moment she was satisfied. But she was not long satisfied. She became aware that there was trouble somewhere; there was a kind of constraint in the social atmosphere of the house; she even found the honest and hearty John Shortlands given to moody staring into the fire. So she went to her own room, and sat down, and wrote the following note:—

“Allt-nam-ba, Friday.

“MY DEAR ARCHIE—We are all in a state of dreadful depression here, on account of the bad weather, and the gentlemen shut up with nothing to do. Please, please, take

pity on us, and come along to dinner at seven. Last night, in spite of the gale, Duncan played the *Hills of Lynn* outside after dinner; and it seemed a kind of message that you ought to have been here. I believe the gentlemen have fixed next Tuesday, if the weather is fine, for the driving of the hares on the far-off heights; and I know they expect you to go with them; and we have engaged a whole crowd of shepherds and others to help in the beating. There is to be a luncheon where the *Uska-nan-Shean*, as Duncan calls it, but I am afraid the spelling is not right, comes into the Allt Crôm, and it will not be difficult for me to reach there, so that I can see how you have been getting on. Do you know that Monaglen is for sale?—what a joy it will be if Mr. Melville should get it back again, after all—that will indeed be *Melville's Welcome Home!* You will make us all very happy if you will come along at seven, and spend the evening with us.—Yours affectionately,
YOLANDE."

She sent this out to be taken to Lynn Towers by one of the gillies, who was to wait for an answer; and in something more than an hour the lad on the sturdy little black pony brought back this note:—

Lynn Towers, Friday afternoon.

"DEAR YOLANDE—I regret very much that I cannot dine with you to-night; and as for Tuesday, I am afraid that will be also impossible, as I go to Inverness to-morrow. I hope they will have a good day.—Yours sincerely, A. LESLIE."

She regarded this answer at first with astonishment; then she felt inclined to laugh.

"Look at this, then, for a love-letter!" she said to herself.

But by and by she began to attach more importance to it. The coldness of it seemed studied; yet she had done nothing that she knew of to offend him. What was amiss? Could he be dissatisfied with her conduct in any direction? She had tried to be most kind to him, as was her duty; and until quite recently they had been on most friendly terms. What had she done? Then she began to form the suspicion that her father and John Shortlands were concealing something—she knew not what—from her. Had it anything to do with

the Master? Had it anything to do with the singular circumstance that not even the most formal visiting relationship had been established between Lynn Towers and the Lodge? Why did her father seem disturbed when she proposed to send a haunch of venison to the Towers—the most common act of civility?

It was strange that, with these disquieting surmises going on in her brain, she should think of seeking information and counsel, not from her father, nor from Mr. Shortlands, nor from the Master of Lynn, but from Jack Melville. It was quite spontaneously and naturally that she thought she would like to put all her difficulties before him; but on reflection she justified herself to herself. He was most likely to know, being on friendly terms with everybody. If there was nothing to disquiet her—nothing to reproach herself with—he was just the person to laugh the whole thing away and send her home satisfied. She could trust him. He did not treat her quite so much as a child as the others did. Even when he spoke bluntly to her, in his schoolmasterish way, she had a vague and humorous suspicion that he was quite aware that their companionship was much more on a common footing than all that came to; and that she submitted because she thought it pleased him. Then she had got to believe that he would do much for her. If she asked him to tell her honestly what he knew, he would. The others might try to hide things from her; they might wish to be considerate towards her; they might be afraid of wounding her sensitiveness; whereas she knew that if she went to John Melville he would speak straight to her, for she had arrived at the still further conclusion that he knew he could trust her, as she trusted him. Altogether, it was a dangerous situation.

Next morning had an evil and threatening look about it; but fortunately there was a brisk breeze; and towards noon that had so effectually swept the clouds over that the long wide valley was filled with bright warm sunshine. Yolande resolved to drive in to Gress. There was no game to take to Foyers; but there were two consignments of household materials from Inverness to be fetched from Whitebridge. Besides, she wanted to know what Mrs. Bell had done about Monaglen and the lawyers. And besides, she wanted to know

where *Alchemilla arvensis* ended and *A. alpina* began; for she had got one or two varieties that seemed to come in between; and she had all a beginner's faith in the strict lines of species. There was, in short, an abundance of reasons.

On arriving at Gress, however, she found that Mr. Melville, having finished his forenoon work in the school, had gone off to his electric storehouse away up in the hills, and so she sent on the dog-cart to Whitebridge, and was content to wait awhile with Mrs. Bell.

"I'll just send him a message, and he'll come down presently."

"Oh no, please don't; it is a long way to send any one," Yolande protested.

"It's no a long way to send a wee bit flash o' fire, or whatever it is, that sets a bell ringing up there," said the old dame. "It's wonderful, his devices. Sometimes I think it's mair than naitural. Over there, in the laboratory, he has got a kind of ear-trumpet; and if you take out the stopper, and listen in quateness, you'll hear every word that's going on in the school."

"That is what they call a telephone, I suppose?"

"The very thing!" said Mrs. Bell, as she left the room to send a message to him.

When she came back, she was jubilant.

"My dear young leddy, I am that glad to see ye! I've sent the letter."

"What letter?"

"To the lawyers. Oh, I was a lang, lang time thinking o't; for they lawyers are kittle cattle to deal wi'; and I kenned fine if I was too eager they would jalouse what I was after; and then they would be up to their pranks. So I just telled them that I did not want Monaglen for myself—which is as true's the Gospel—but that if they happened to hear what was the lowest price that would be taken, they might send me word, in case I should come across a customer for them. It doesna do to be too eager about a bargain, especially wi' they lawyers; it's just inviting them to commit a highway robbery on ye."

"If Mr. Melville," said Yolande, quickly, "were to have Monaglen, he would still remain in this neighbourhood, then?"

"Nae doot about that! It'll be a' a man's wark to put the place to rights again; for the factor is a puir body, and the young gentleman never came here—he has plenty elsewhere, I have been told."

"Mr. Melville would still be living here?" said Yolande, eagerly.

"At Monaglen, ay; and it's no so far away. But it will make a difference to me," the old dame said, with a sigh. "For I have got used to his ways about the hoose; and it will seem empty like."

"Then you will not go to Monaglen?"

"'Deed no; that would never do. I wouldna like to go as a servant, for I have been living too long in idleness; and I couldna go back in any other kind of a way, for I ken my place. Na, na; I will just bide where I am and I will keep £220 a year, or thereabouts, for mysel'; and wi' that I can mak' ends meet brawly, in spite o' they spendrif hussies."

These romantic projects seemed to have a great fascination for this good dame (who had seen far less that was attractive in the prospect of being given away in marriage by a famous Duke); and she and Yolande kept on talking about them with much interest, until a step outside on the gravel caused the colour to rush to the girl's face. She did not know that, when she rose on his entrance. She did not know that she looked embarrassed, because she did not feel embarrassed. Always she had a sense of safety in his presence. She had not to watch her words, or think of what he was thinking of what she was saying. And on this occasion she did not even make the pretence of having come about *Alchemilla alpina*. She apologised for having brought him down from his electric works; asked him if he would take a turn in the garden for a minute or two, as she had something to say to him; and then went out, he following. She did not notice that when she made this last remark his face looked rather grave.

"Mr. Leslie went to Inverness this morning?" she said, when they were out in the garden.

"Yes; he looked in as he was passing."

"Do you know why he went?"

"Well," said he, "I believe they have been having some dispute about the marches of the forest; but I am told it is

to be all amicably settled. I fancy Archie is going to have the matter squared up in Inverness."

She hesitated then. She took up a flower; regarded it for a second; and then looked him fair in the face.

"Mr. Melville," said she, "do you think it strange that I ask you this question?—you are Mr. Leslie's friend: is he offended with me?"

His eyes were looking at hers, too—rather watchfully: he was on his guard.

"I have not the slightest reason to suppose that he is," was the answer, given with some earnestness, for he was glad to find the question so simple.

"None? I have not done anything that he could complain of—to you or any one?"

"I assure you I never heard him breathe a word of the kind. Besides," added he, with a very unusual warmth in the pale cheeks, "I wouldn't listen. No man could be such a coward——"

"Oh, please don't think that I am angry," she said, with earnest entreaty. "Please don't think I have to complain. Oh no! But every one knows what mischief is wrought sometimes by mistake; some one being offended and not giving a chance of explanation; and—and—I was only anxious to be assured that I had done nothing to vex him. His going away without seeing us seemed so strange—yes; and also his not coming of late to the Lodge; and—and—my papa seems to be troubled about something: so that I became anxious; and I knew you would tell me the truth, if no one else would. And it is all right, then? There is no reason to be disturbed, to be anxious?"

He was disturbed, at all events; and sorely perplexed. He dared not meet her eyes; they seemed to read him through and through when he ventured to look up.

"Don't imagine for a moment that you have anything to reproach yourself with—not for a moment," he said.

"Has any one, then?"

"Why, no. But—but—well, I will be honest with you, Yolande; there has been a little trouble—at the Towers. The old people are not easy to please; and—and Archie has too much spirit to allow you to be dragged into a controversy,

you see ; and as they don't get on very well together, I suppose he is glad to get off for a few days to Inverness."

"Ah, I understand," she said, slowly. "That is something to know. But why did he not tell me? Does he think I am afraid of a little trouble like that? Does he think I should be frightened? Oh no. When I make a promise, it is not to break it. He should have trusted me more than that. Ah, I am sorry he has to go away on my account. Why did he not speak? It is strange."

And then she regarded him with those clear, beautiful, contemplative eyes of hers.

"Have you told me everything?"

He did not answer.

"No. There is more. There is more to account for my papa's trouble—for his going away this morning. And why do I come to you?—because I know that what you know you will tell to me. You have been my friend since ever we came to this place."

He could not withstand her appeal ; and yet he dared not reveal a secret which was not his own.

"Yolande," said he, and he took her hand to emphasise his words, "there is more ; but it is not I who must tell you. What I can tell you, and what I hope you will believe, is that you are in no way the cause of anything that may have happened. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. And any little trouble there may be will be removed in time, no doubt. When you have done your best, what more can you do? 'The rest is with the gods.'"

It is just possible that she might have begged him to make a candid confession of all that he knew—for she had a vague fear that she herself was the cause of that anxiety which she saw too visibly in her father's look—but at this moment the dog-cart drove up to the front gate, and she had to go. She bade him, and also Mrs. Bell, good-bye almost in silence ; she went away thoughtfully. And as he watched her disappear along the highroad—the warm westering light touching the red-gold of her hair—he was thoughtful too ; and his heart yearned towards her with a great pity ; and there was not much that this man would not have done to save her from the shadow that was about to fall on her young life.

CHAPTER XXX.

“DARE ALL.”

HE could not rest, somehow. He went into the laboratory, and looked vacantly around; the objects there seemed to have no interest for him. Then he went back to the house—into the room where he had found her standing; and that had more of a charm for him: the atmosphere still seemed to bear the perfume of her presence, the music of her voice still seemed to hang in the air. She had left on the table—she had forgotten, indeed—a couple of boards inclosing two specimens of the *Alchemilla*. These he turned over, regarding with some attention the pretty, quaint French handwriting at the foot of the page—“*Alchemilla alpina. Alpine Lady’s-mantle. Allt-nam-ba, September 188—*”; but still his mind was absent; he was following in imagination the girl herself, going away along the road there, alone, to meet the revelation that was to alter her life.

And was he going to stand by, idle? Was he going to limit himself to the part he had been asked to play—that of mere message-bearer? Could he not do something? Was he to be dominated by the coward fear of being called an intermeddler? He had not pondered over all this matter (with a far deeper interest than he himself imagined!) without result. He had his own views, his own remedy; he knew what counsel he would give, if he dared intervene. And why should he not dare? He thought of the expression of her face as she had said, with averted eyes, “Good-bye!” and then—why, then, a sudden impulse seized him that somehow and at once he must get to Allt-nam-ba, and that before she should meet her father.

He snatched up his hat and went quickly out and through the little front garden into the road; there he paused. Of course, he could not follow her; she must needs see him coming up the wide strath; and in that case what excuse could he give? But what if the shooting party had not yet come down from the hill? Might he not intercept them

somewhere? Sometimes, when they had been taking the far tops in search of a ptarmigan or two, they came home late—to be scolded by the young house-mistress for keeping dinner back. Well, the result of these rapid calculations was that the next minute he had set out to climb, with a swiftness that was yet far too slow for the eagerness of his wishes, the steep and rough and rugged hills that stretch away up to the neighbourhood of Lynn forest.

First it was over peat-bog and rock; then through a tangled undergrowth of young birches; then up through some precipitous gullies; until at last he had gained the top and looked abroad over the forest—that wide, desolate, silent wilderness. Not a creature stirred; not even the chirp of a chaffinch broke the oppressive stillness; it seemed a world of death. But he had no time to take note of such matters; besides the solitude of a deer-forest was familiar to him. He held along by the hill-top, sometimes having to descend into sharp little gullies and clamber up again, until, far below him, he came in sight of Lynn Towers, and the bridge, and the stream, and the loch; and onwards still he kept his way, until the strath came in view, with Allt-nam-ba, and a pale blue smoke rising from the chimneys into the still evening air. Probably Yolande had got home by that time; perhaps she might be out and walking round the place—talking to the dogs in the kennel, and so forth. So he kept rather back from the edge of the hill-top, so that he should not be descried, and in due time arrived at a point overlooking the junction of three glens, down one of which the shooting-people, if they had not already reached the lodge, were almost certain to come.

He looked and waited, however, in vain; and he was coming to the conclusion that they must have already passed and gone on to the lodge, when he fancied he saw something move behind some birch bushes on the hillside beyond the glen. Presently he made out what it was—a pony grazing, and gradually coming more and more into view. Then he reflected that the pony could only be there for one purpose; that probably the attendant gillie and the panniers were hidden from sight behind those birches; and that, if it were so, the shooting party had not returned, and were bound to come back that way. A very few minutes of further waiting proved

his conjectures to be right ; a scattered group of people, with dogs in to heel, appearing on the crest of the hill opposite. Then he had no further doubt. Down this slope he went at headlong speed ; crossed the rushing burn by springing from boulder to boulder ; scrambled up through the thick brush-wood and heather of the opposite banks ; and very soon encountered the returning party, who were now watching the panniers being put on the pony's back.

Now that he had intercepted Mr. Winterbourne, there was no need for hurry. He could take time to recover his breath ; and also to bethink himself as to how he should approach this difficult matter ; and then, again, he did not wish those people to imagine that he had come on any important errand. And so the conversation, as the pony was being loaded, was all about the day's sport. They had done very well, it appeared ; the birds had not yet got wild, and there was no sign of packing ; they had got a couple of teal and a golden plover, which was something of a variety ; also, they had had the satisfaction of seeing a large eagle—which Duncan declared to be a Golden Eagle—at unusually close quarters.

Then they set out for home : Duncan and the gillies making a way for a sort of ford by which they could get the pony across the Dun Water ; while the three others took a nearer way to the lodge by getting down through a gullie to the Corrie-an-Eich, where there was a swing-bridge across the burn. When they had got to the bridge, Melville stopped them.

"I am not going on with you to the lodge," said he. "Mr. Winterbourne, I have seen your daughter this afternoon. She is troubled and anxious ; and I thought I'd come along and have a word with you. I hope you will forgive me for thrusting myself in where I may not be wanted ; but—but it is not always the right thing to 'pass by on the other side.' I couldn't in this case."

"I am sure we are most thankful to you for what you have done already," Yolande's father said, promptly ; and then he added, with a weary look in his face, "and what is to be done now, I don't know. I cannot bring myself to this that Leslie demands. It is too terrible. I look at the girl—well, it does not bear speaking of."

"Look here, Winterbourne," John Shortlands said, "I am

going to leave you two together. I will wait for you the other side. But I would advise you to listen well to anything that Mr. Melville has to say; I have my own guess."

With that he proceeded to make his way across the narrow and swaying bridge, leaving these two alone.

"What I want to know, first of all," Mr. Winterbourne said, with a kind of despair in his voice, "is whether you are certain that the Master will insist? Why should he? How could it matter to him? I thought we had done everything when we let him know. Why should Yolande know? Why make her miserable to no end? Look what has been done to keep this knowledge from her all through these years; and you can see the result in the gaiety of her heart. Would she have been like that if she had known—if she had always been thinking of one who ought to be near her, and perhaps blaming herself for holding aloof from her? She would have been quite different; she would have been old in sadness by this time; whereas she has never known what a care was. Mr. Melville, you are his friend; you know him better than any of us; don't you think there is some chance of reasoning with him and inducing him to forego this demand? It seems so hard."

The suffering that this man was undergoing was terrible. His questions formed almost a cry of entreaty; and Jack Melville could scarcely bring himself to answer in what he well knew to be the truth.

"I cannot deceive you," he said, after a second. "There is no doubt that Leslie's mind is made up on the point. When I undertook to carry his message he more than once repeated his clear decision——"

"But why? What end will it serve? How could it matter to them—living away from London? How could they be harmed?"

"Mr. Winterbourne," said the other, with something of a clear emphasis, "when I reported Leslie's decision to Mr. Shortlands, as I was asked to do, I refused to defend it—or to attack it, for that matter—and I would rather not do so now. What I might think right in the same case—what you might think right—does not much matter. I told Mr. Shortlands that perhaps we did not know everything that

might lead to such a decision ; Leslie has not been on good terms with his father and aunt, and he thinks he is being badly used. There may be other things ; I do not know."

"And how do we know that it will suffice?" the other said. "How do we know that it will satisfy him and his people? Are we to inflict all this pain and sorrow on the girl, and then wait to see whether that is enough?"

"It is not what I would do," said Jack Melville, who had not come here for nothing.

"What would you do, then? Can you suggest anything?" her father said, eagerly. "Ah, you little know how we should value any one who could remove this thing from us!"

"What I would do? Well, I will tell you. I would go to that girl, and I would see how much of the woman is in her; I think you will find enough. I would say to her: 'There is your mother; that is the condition she has sunk into through those accursed drugs. Every means has been tried to save her without avail—every means save one. It is for you to go to her—you yourself—alone. Who knows what resurrection of will and purpose may not arise within her, when it is her own daughter who stands before her and appeals to her—when it is her own daughter who will be by her side during the long struggle? That is your duty as a daughter; will you do it?' If I know the girl, you will not have to say more!"

The wretched man opposite seemed almost to recoil from him in his dismay. "Good God!" he muttered; and there was a sort of blank, vague terror in his face. Melville stood silent and calm, awaiting an answer.

"It is the suggestion of a devil," said this man, who was quite aghast, and seemed scarcely to comprehend the whole thing just yet, "or else of an angel. Why——"

"It is the suggestion neither of a devil nor an angel," said Melville, calmly, "but of a man who has read a few medical books."

The other, with the half horror-stricken look in the eyes, seemed to be thinking hard of all that might happen; and his two hands clasped together over the muzzle of his gun, which was resting on the ground, were trembling.

"Oh, it is impossible—impossible!" he cried at length. "It is inhuman. You have not thought of it sufficiently. My

girl to go through *that*; have you considered what you are proposing to subject her to?"

"I have considered," Jack Melville said (perhaps with a passing qualm; for there was a pathetic cry in this man's voice); "and I have thought of it sufficiently, I hope. I would not have dared to make the suggestion without the most anxious consideration."

"And you would subject Yolande to *that*?"

"No," said the other, "I would not. I would not subject her to anything; I would put the case before her, and I know what her own answer would be. I don't think any one would have to use prayers and entreaties. I don't think it would be necessary to try much persuasion. I say this—put the case before her, and I will stake my head I can tell what her answer will be—what her decision will be—yes, and before you have finished your story!"

"And to go alone——"

"She will not be afraid!"

He seemed to have a very profound conviction of his knowledge of this girl's nature; and there was a kind of pride in the way he spoke.

"But why alone?" pleaded the father—he seemed to be imagining all kinds of things with those haggard eyes.

"I would not have the mental shock lessened by the presence of any one. I would have no possible suspicion of a trap—a bait—a temptation. I would have it between these two: the daughter's appeal to her mother. I am not afraid of the result."

"She could not! My girl to go away by herself—she could not! it is too terrible!"

"Try her."

"She has never travelled alone. Why, even to go to London by herself——"

"Oh, but that has nothing to do with it. That is not what I mean at all. As for that her maid would go with her as a matter of course; and Mr. Shortlands might see her as far as London if he is going south shortly, as I hear. She could put up at one or other of the hotels that she has already stayed at with you. Then you would give her the address; *and leave the rest to her.*"

"You have been thinking over this," Mr. Winterbourne

said. "I have not. I am rather bewildered about it. Shall we ask Shortlands?"

"If you wish. But first let me explain, Mr. Winterbourne. As I understand, several arrangements have been made with this poor woman—only, unhappily to be broken by her. Well, now, why I want Yolande to go alone—if you think the experiment should be tried at all—is to prevent suspicion in the poor woman's mind. I would have no third person. It should be a matter between the two women themselves; and Yolande must insist on seeing her mother alone."

"Insist! Yes, and insist with two such wretches as those Romfords! Why, the man might insult her—he might lay hands on her, and force her out of the house."

Melville's pale dark face grew darker at this; and his eyes had a sudden sharp fire in them.

"She must have a policeman waiting outside," he said, curtly. "And her maid must go inside with her—but not necessarily into the room."

"And then," said Mr. Winterbourne—who was apparently picturing all this before his mind; "supposing she were to get her mother away with her—what then?"

"She would take her back to the hotel. She must have a private sitting-room, of course. Then in two or three days' time, when she had got the necessary travelling-things for her mother, she would take her down to some quiet seaside place—Eastbourne or Bournemouth, or some such place—and get rooms there. The two women would get to know each other that way; Yolande would always be with her; her constant society would be her mother's safeguard."

"You have thought of everything—you have thought of everything," the father murmured. "Well, let us see what Shortlands says. It is a terrible risk. I am not hopeful myself. The thing is—is it fair to bring all this distress and suffering on the girl on such a remote chance?"

"You must judge of that," said Melville. "You asked me what I would do. I have told you."

Mr. Winterbourne was about to step on to the bridge—across which only one could go at a time; but he suddenly turned back and said, with some earnest emphasis, to the younger man—

"Do not imagine that because I hesitate I think any the less of your thoughtfulness. Not many would have done as much. Whatever happens, I know what your intentions were towards us." He took Melville's hand for a moment, and pressed it. "And I thank you for her sake and for my own. May God bless you!"

When they got to the other side they found John Shortlands seated on a boulder of granite, smoking a cigar. He was not much startled by this proposal—for Melville had mentioned something of the kind to him in an interjectional sort of fashion, some time before; and he had given it a brief, but rather unfavourable, consideration. Now as they talked the matter over, it appeared that he stood about midway between these two; having neither the eager enthusiasm of Jack Melville nor yet the utter hopelessness of his friend Winterbourne.

"If you think it is worth trying, try it," said he, coolly. "It can't do much harm. If Yolande is to know, she may as well know to some end. Other things have been tried and failed; this might not. The shock might bring her to her senses. Anyhow, don't you see, if you once tell Yolande all about it, I rather fancy she will be dissatisfied until she has made a trial."

"That is what I am certain of," Melville said, quickly. "I would contentedly leave it to herself. Only the girl must have some guidance."

"Surely, surely," said John Shortlands. "I consider your plan very carefully laid out—if Winterbourne will risk it. The only other way is to leave Yolande in her present happy ignorance; and tell the Master of Lynn, and his father, and his aunt, and whatever other relations he has, to go to the devil."

"Shortlands," said Mr. Winterbourne, angrily, "this is a serious thing; it is not to be settled in your free and easy way. I suppose you wouldn't mind bringing on Yolande the mortification of being jilted? How could you explain to her? She would be left—without a word. And I hear she is beginning to be anxious already. Poor child, whichever way it goes, she will have enough to suffer."

"I should not mind so much which way it goes," said John Shortlands, bluntly, "if only somebody would take the Master

of Lynn by the scruff of the neck, and oblige me by kicking him from Allt-nam-ba Bridge to Foyers Pier."

"Come, come," said Melville (though he was by much the youngest of these three), "the less said in that way the better. What you want is to make the best of things; not to stir up ill-will. For my part, I regard Miss Winterbourne's engagement to Mr. Leslie as a secondary matter—at this present moment; I consider her first duty is to her mother; and I am pretty sure you will find that will be her opinion when you put the facts of the case before her. Yes; I am pretty certain of that."

"And who would undertake to tell her?" her father said. "Who could face the suffering, the shame, you would see in her eyes? Who would dare to suggest to her that she, so tenderly cared for all her life, should go away and encounter these horrors?"

There was silence.

"If it comes to that," said Melville, slowly, "I will do it. If you think it right—if it will give you pain to speak to her—let me speak to her."

"You?" said her father. "Why should you undertake what cannot but be a dreadful task? Why should you have to bear that?"

"Oh," said he, "my share in the common trouble would be slight. Besides, I have not many friends; and when one has the chance of lending a hand, don't you understand, it is a kind of gratification. I know it will not be pleasant—except for one thing. I am looking forward to her answer; and I know what it will be."

"But, really," her father said, with some hesitation, "is it fair we should put this on you? It is a great sacrifice to ask from one who has been so recently our friend. You have seen her—you have seen how light-hearted she is; and to ask any one to go and take away the happy carelessness of her life from her——"

"Yes, it will make a change," said Melville, thoughtfully. "I know that. She will be no longer a girl. She will be a woman."

"At all events, Winterbourne," John Shortlands broke in, "what I said before I say now—you are the last man to

undertake such a job. You'd frighten the girl out of her senses. It's bad enough as it is ; and it'll have to be told her by degrees. I would have a try myself ; but I might say something about the cause of her having to be told ; and that would only make mischief. If I said anything about your friend Leslie, Mr. Melville, I ask you to forget it. No use making rows. And I say, if Winterbourne decides on taking your way out of this troublous business, and if you don't mind doing what you've offered to do, you could not find a better time than next Tuesday, if that will be convenient for you, for we shall be all away at the far tops that day, and I daresay it will take you some time to break the news gently."

"I am quite at your service, either on Tuesday or any other day, whenever you let me know what you have decided."

He would not go on to the house with them, despite all their solicitations ; on the other hand, he begged them not to say to Yolande that they had seen him. So they went on their way down to the little lodge and its dependencies ; while he went back and over the hills.

"He's a damned fine fellow that, and no mistake," said the plain-spoken John Shortlands. "There is a sort of broad human nature about him. And I should think, Winterbourne, you were very much obliged to him."

"Obliged?" said Yolande's father. "It is scarcely the word."

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONTRITION.

MRS. GRAHAM, attended by her maid, and dressed in one of the most striking of her costumes, was slowly pacing up and down the loud-echoing railway-station at Inverness. This was what her brother used spitefully to call her platform parade ; but on this occasion, at all events, she had no concern about what effect, if any, her undoubtedly distinguished appearance might produce. She was obviously deeply preoccupied. Several times she stopped at the book-stall, and absently glanced at the titles of the various journals ; and, indeed, when

at length she had purchased one or two papers, she forgot to take up the change, and had to be called back by the pretty young lady behind the counter. Then she glanced at the clock, handed the newspapers to her maid, and bade her wait there for a few minutes; and forthwith entered the Station Hotel.

She passed along the corridor, and went into the drawing-room. From that room she had a full view of the general reading-room, which forms the centre of the building, and is lit from the roof; and the first glance showed her the person of whom she was in search. The Master of Lynn, the sole occupant of the place, was lying back in a cane-bottomed rocking-chair, turning over the pages of *Punch*.

"So I have found you at last. What are you doing here?" she said—rather sharply.

He looked up.

"I might ask the same question of you," he answered, with much coolness.

"You know well enough. It is not for nothing I have come all the way from Inverstroy."

"You must have got up early," he remarked.

"I want to know what you are doing here."

"I am reading *Punch*."

"Yes," said she, with some bitterness; "and I suppose your chief occupation is playing billiards all day long with commercial travellers!"

"One might be worse employed."

"Archie, let us have none of this nonsense. What do you mean to do? Why don't you answer my letters?"

"Because you make too much of a fuss. Because you are too portentous. Now I like a quiet life. That is why I am here; I came here to have a little peace."

"Well, I don't understand you at all," his sister said, in a hopeless kind of way. "I could understand it better if you were one of those young men who are attracted by every pretty face they see, and are always in a simmering condition of love-making. But you are not like that. And I thought you were proud to think of Yolande as your future wife. I can remember one day on board the dahabeeah. You were anxious enough then. What has changed you?"

"I do not know that I am changed," said he, either with indifference or an affectation of indifference.

"Is *Shena Vàn* in Inverness?" said Mrs. Graham, sharply.

"I suppose Miss Stewart has as good a right to be in Inverness as anybody else," he said, formally.

"Do you mean to say you don't know whether she is in Inverness or not?"

"I did not say anything of the kind."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"Don't keep on bothering," he said, impatiently. "Miss Stewart is in Inverness; and, if you want to know, I have not spoken a single word to her. Is that enough?"

"Why are you here, then? What are you going to do?"

"Nothing."

"Really this is too bad, Archie," his sister said, in deep vexation. "You are throwing away the best prospects a young man ever had, and all for what! For temper!"

"I don't call it temper at all," said he. "I call it self-respect. I have told you already that I would not degrade Yolande Winterbourne so far as to plead for her being received by my family. A pretty idea!"

"There would have been no necessity to plead, if only you had exercised a little patience, and tact, and judgment. And surely it is not too late yet. Just think how much pleasanter it would be for you, and for all of us, in the future if you were rather more on an equal footing with Jim—I mean as regards money. I don't see why you shouldn't have your clothes made at Poole's, as Jim has. Why shouldn't you have chamois-leather pockets in your overcoat as well as he?"

"I can do without chamois-leather pockets," he answered.

"Very well," said she, suddenly changing the mode of her attack, "but what you cannot do without is the reputation of having acted as a gentleman. You are bound in honour to keep faith with Yolande Winterbourne."

"I am bound in honour not to allow her to subject herself to insult," he retorted.

"Oh, there will be nothing of the kind!" his sister exclaimed. "How can you be so unreasonable?"

"You don't know the worst of it," said he, gloomily. "I only got to know the other day. Yolande's mother is alive

—an opium drinker. Off her head at times—kicks up rows in the streets—and they are helpless, because they have all been in this conspiracy to keep it back from Yolande——”

“You don’t mean that, Archie!” his sister exclaimed, looking very grave.

“I do, though. And, you know, his lordship might in time be got to overlook the Radical papa, but a mamma who might at any moment figure in a police court—I think not even you could get him to stand that.”

“But, Archie, this is dreadful!” Mrs. Graham exclaimed again.

“I daresay it is. It is the fact, however.”

“And that is why he was so anxious to get Yolande away from London,” she said, thoughtfully. “Poor man, what a terrible life to lead!”

She was silent for some time; she was reading the story more clearly now—his continual travelling with Yolande, his liking for long voyages, his wish that the girl should live in the Highlands after her marriage. And perhaps, also, his warm and obvious approval of that marriage—she knew that fathers with only daughters were not always so complaisant.

Two or three strangers came into the reading-room.

“Archie,” said she, waking up from a reverie, “let us go out for a stroll. I must think over this.”

He went and fetched his hat and stick; and the maid having been directed to go into the hotel and await her mistress’ return, the brother and sister went outside and proceeded to walk leisurely through the bright and cheerful little town, in the direction of the harbour.

“What is your own view of the matter?” she said, at length, and somewhat cautiously.

“Oh, my position is perfectly clear. I can have nothing to do with any such system of secrecy and terrorism. I told Jack Melville that when he came as a sort of ambassador. I said I would on no account whatever subject myself to such unnecessary risks and anxieties. My contention was that, first of all, the whole truth should be told to Yolande; then if that woman keeps quiet, good and well; if not, we can appeal to the law and have her forcibly confined. There is nothing more simple; and I daresay it could be kept out of the papers.

But then, you see, my dear Miss Polly, there is also the possibility that it might get into the papers ; and if you add on this little possibility to what his lordship already thinks about the whole affair, you may guess what use all your beautiful persuasion and tact and conciliation would be."

"I don't see," said Mrs. Graham, slowly, "why papa should know anything about it. It does not concern him. Many families have ne'er-do-well or disreputable members ; and simply nothing is said about them ; and they are supposed not to exist. Friends of the family ignore them ; they are simply not mentioned, until in time they are forgotten altogether ; it is as if they did not exist. I don't see why papa should be told anything about it."

"Oh, I am for having everything straightforward," said he. "I don't wish to have anything thrown in my teeth afterwards. But the point isn't worth discussing in the present state of his lordship's temper ; and it isn't likely to be so long as that old cat is at his elbow. Well, now, that is what Mr. Winterbourne might fairly say. He might say we had no right to object to his having a half-maniac wife in his family so long as we had an entirely maniac aunt—who is also a cantankerous old beast—in ours."

"Archie, I must ask you to be more decent in your language !" his sister said, angrily. "Is that the way the young men talk at Balliol now?"

"I guess it's the way they talk everywhere when they happen to have the luxury of having an Aunt Colquhoun as a relative."

"My dear Master, you won't go very far to put matters straight if you continue in that mood."

"Am I anxious to go far to put matters straight?"

"You ought to be—for the sake of Miss Winterbourne," said his sister, stiffly.

"No," he answered ; "it is they who ought to be—for the sake of Lynn."

Well, she saw there was not much to be done with him just then ; and, indeed, there was something in what he had told her that wanted thinking over. But in the meantime she was greatly relieved to find that he had not (as she had suspected) resumed any kind of relations with Shena Vîn ; and

she was anxious above all things to get him away from Inverness.

"When are you going back to Lynn?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered, carelessly.

"Now, do be sensible, Archie, and go down with me in this afternoon's steamer. All this trouble will be removed in good time; and you need not make the operation unnecessarily difficult. I am going down to Fort Augustus by the three o'clock boat; you can come with me as far as Foyers."

"Oh, I don't mind," he said. "I have had a little peace and quiet; I can afford to go back to the menagerie. Only there won't be anybody to meet me at Foyers."

"You can get a dog-cart from Mrs. Elder," his sister said. "And if you were very nice, you would take me back to your hotel now, and give me some lunch, for I am frightfully hungry. Do you know at what hour I had to get up in order to catch the boat at Fort Augustus?"

"I don't see why you did it."

"No, perhaps not. But when you are as old as I am, you will see with different eyes. You will see what chances you had at this moment, that you seem willing to let slip through your fingers; and why?—because you have not enough patience to withstand a little opposition. But you know perfectly well, when you asked Yolande Winterbourne to marry you, on board the dahabeeah, that papa might very probably have objections; and you took the risk; and now, when you find there are objections and opposition, I don't think it is quite fair for you to throw the whole thing up, and leave the girl deserted, and every one disappointed. And it all depends on yourself. You have only to be patient and conciliatory; when they see that you are not to be affected by their opposition, they will give in, in time. And as soon as the people go away from Inverstry, I will come over and help you."

He said nothing; so they went back and had lunch at the hotel; and in due time, Mrs. Graham's maid accompanying, they drove along to the Canal and got on board the little steamer. They had a beautiful sail down Loch Ness on this still, golden afternoon; but perhaps the picturesqueness of the scenery was a trifle familiar to them; in fact, they regarded the noble loch mostly as an excellent highway for the easy

transference of casks and hampers from Inverness, and their chief impression of the famous Falls of Foyers was as to the height of the hill that their horses had to climb in going and coming between Foyers and Lynn.

As they were slowly steaming in to Foyers Pier, pretty Mrs. Graham said—

“I wonder if that can be Yolande herself in that dog-cart. Yes; it is; that is her white Rubens hat. Lucky, for you, Master; if she gives you a lift, it will save you hiring.”

“I don’t think,” said he, with a faint touch of scorn, “that the mutual excess of courtesy which has been interchanged between Lynn Towers and Allt-nam-ba would warrant me in accepting such a favour. But the cat bows when she and Yolande pass. Oh yes, she does as much as that.”

“And she will do a little more in time, if only you are reasonable,” said his sister, who still hoped that all would be well.

Young Leslie had merely a hand-bag with him. When he left the steamer, he walked along the pier by himself until he reached the road, and there he found Yolande seated in the dog-cart. He went up and shook hands with her; and she seemed very pleased to see him.

“You are going to Lynn? Shall I drive you out?”

“No, thank you,” said he, somewhat stiffly. “I will not trouble you. I can get a trap at the hotel.”

She looked surprised, and then, perhaps, a trifle reserved.

“Oh, very well,” said she, with calm politeness. “The hotel carriages have more room than this little one. Good-bye.”

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had no quarrel with her. She might be the indirect cause of all this trouble and confusion that had befallen him; but she was certainly not the direct cause. She was in absolute ignorance of it, in fact. And so he lingered for a second; and then he said, looking up—

“You have no one coming by the steamer?”

“Oh no,” she said; but she did not renew the invitation—indeed, there was just a touch of coldness in her manner.

“If I thought I should not overload the dog-cart,” said he, rather shamefacedly, “I would beg of you to give me a seat. I understand the stag’s head has come down by this steamer. I saw it at Macleay’s this morning.”

"It is that I have come in for—that only," she said. "There is plenty of room, if you wish."

So, without more ado, he put his hand-bag into the dog-cart, behind; and there also was deposited the stag's head that Sandy was now bringing along from the steamer. Then, when the lad had gone to the horse's head, Yolande got down; for she always walked this steep hill, whether going or coming; and, of course, no men-folk could remain in the vehicle when she was on foot. So she and the Master now set out together.

"I hope they have been having good sport at Allt-nam-ba," he said.

"Oh yes."

It was clear that his unaccountable refusal of her invitation had surprised her; and her manner was distinctly reserved. Seeing that, he took the more pains to please her.

"Macleay has done the stag's head very well," said he; "and I have no doubt Mr. Shortlands will be proud of it. Pity it isn't a royal; but still it is a good head. It is curious how people's ideas change as they go on preserving stag's heads. At first, it is everything they shoot, no matter what; and every head must be stuffed. Then they begin to find that expensive; and they take to boiling the heads, keeping only the skull and the horns. Then they begin to improve their collection by weeding out the second and third rate heads, which they give to their friends. And then, in the end, they are quite disappointed with anything short of a royal. I went in to Macleay's a day or two ago, and asked him to push on with that head. I thought Mr. Shortlands would like to see how it looked hung up in the lodge; and I thought you might like to see it too."

"It was very kind of you," she said.

"Has the great hare drive come off?" he asked—and surely he was trying to be as pleasant as he could be. "Oh, I think you said it was to be to-morrow. I should like to have gone with them; but, to tell you the truth, Yolande, I am a little bit ashamed. Your father has been too kind to me—that is the fact. Of course, if we had the forest in our own hands, it would not matter so much; for your father then might have a return invitation to go for a day or two's deer-stalking. But with everything let, you see, I am helpless;

and your father's kindness to me has been almost embarrassing. Then there is another thing. My father and aunt are odd people. They live too much in seclusion; they have got out of the way of entertaining friends, because, with the forest and the shooting always let, they could scarcely ask any one to come and live in such a remote place. It is a pity. Look at the other families in Inverness-shire; look at Lord Lovat, look at Lord Seafield, look at The Mackintosh, and these; they go out into the world; they don't box themselves up in one place. But then we are poor folk—that is one reason, perhaps; and my father has just one mania in his life—to improve the condition of Lynn; and so he has not gone about, perhaps, as others might have done."

Now it sounded well in her ears that this young man should be inclined to make excuses for his father, even when, as she suspected, the domestic relations at the Towers were somewhat strained; and she instantly adopted a more friendly tone towards him.

"Ah," said she, "what a misfortune yesterday! The red shepherd came running in to say that there were some deer up the glen of the Allt Crôm; and, of course, every one hurried away—my papa and Mr. Shortlands to two of the passes. What a misfortune, there being no one with the beaters. They came upon them—yes, a stag and four hinds, quite calmly standing and nibbling, and away—away—they went up the hill, not going near either of the guns. Was it not sad?"

"Not for the deer."

"And my papa not to have a stag's head to take back as well as Mr. Shortlands!" she said, in great disappointment.

"Oh, but if you like he shall have a finer head to take back than any he would be likely to get in half-a-dozen years of those odd chances. I will give him one I shot—with three horns. I have always had a clear understanding about that: anything I shoot is mine—it doesn't belong to the furniture of Lynn Towers. And I will give that head to your father, if you like; it is a very remarkable one, I can assure you."

"That is kind of you," she said. They were on more friendly terms now; she had forgiven him.

When they got to the summit of the hill, they got into the

dog-cart, and descended the other side, and drove away through the wooded and rocky country. She seemed pleased to be on better terms with him ; and he, on his part, was particularly good-natured and friendly. But when they drew near to Gress she grew a little more thoughtful. She could not quite discard those hints she had received. Then her father's anxious trouble—Was that merely caused by the disagreement that had broken out between the Master and his relatives ? If that were all, matters would mend, surely. She, at all events, was willing to let Time work his healing wonders ; she was in no hurry ; and certainly her pride was not deeply wounded. She rather liked the Master's excuses for those old people who lived so much out of the world. And she was distinctly glad that now there was no suspicion of any coldness between herself and him.

There was no one visible at Gress ; and they drove on without stopping. When they arrived at the bridge, the Master got down to open the swinging iron gate, telling Sandy to keep his seat ; and it was not worth his while to get up again.

“Now,” said Yolande, brightly, “I hope you will change your mind and come along to-morrow morning to Allt-nam-ba and go with the gentlemen, after all. It is to be a great affair.”

“I will see if I can manage it,” said he, evasively ; and then they bade each other good-bye, and she drove on.

But although they had seen no one at Gress, Jack Melville had seen them. He was far up the hillside, seated on some bracken among the rocks ; and his elbows were on his knees, and his head resting on his hands. He had gone away up there to be perfectly alone—to think over all that he was to say to Yolande on the next day. It was a terrible task ; and he knew it.

He saw them drive by ; and his heart had a great pity for this girl.

“The evening is coming over the sky now,” he was thinking, as he looked around, “and she has left behind her the last of the light-hearted days of her life.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

FABULA NARRATUR.

EARLY next morning (for he was anxious to get this painful thing over) he walked slowly and thoughtfully up to Allt-nam-ba. He knew she was at home ; for the dog-cart had gone by with only Sandy in it. Perhaps she might be indoors—working at the microscope he had lent her, or arranging her plants.

She had seen him come up the strath ; she was at the door awaiting him, her face radiant.

“ Ah, but why are you so late ? ” she cried. “ They are all away, shepherds and gillies and all, two hours ago.”

“ I did not mean to go with them. I have come to have a chat with you, Yolande, if you will let me.”

He spoke carelessly ; but there was something in his look that she noticed ; and when she had preceded him into the little drawing-room, she turned and regarded him.

“ What is it ? Is it serious ? ” she said, scanning his face.

Well, he had carefully planned how he would approach the subject ; but at this moment all his elaborate designs went clean away from his brain. A far more happy expedient than any he had thought of had that instant occurred to him. He would tell her this story as of some one else.

“ It is serious in a way,” said he, “ for I am troubled about an unfortunate plight that a friend of mine is in. Why should I bother you about it?—but still, you might give me your advice.”

“ My advice ? ” she said. “ If it would be of any service to you, yes, yes ! But how could it be ? What experience of the world have I had ? ”

“ It isn’t a question of experience of the world ; it is a question of human nature mostly,” said he. “ And this friend of mine is a girl just about your own age. You might tell me what you would do in the same circumstances.”

“ But I might do something very foolish.”

“ I only want to know what you would naturally feel inclined to do. That is the question. You could easily tell

'me that ; and I could not find it out for myself—no, not if I were to set all my electric machines going."

"Ah, well, I will listen very patiently, if I am to be the judge," said she. "And I am glad it is not anything worse. I thought when you came in it was something very serious."

He did not wish to be too serious ; and, indeed, he managed to tell her the whole story in a fashion so plain, matter-of-fact, and unconcerned, that she never for an instant dreamed of its referring to herself. Of course he left out all details and circumstances that might positively have given her a clue, and only described the central situation as between mother and daughter. And Yolande had a great compassion for that poor debased woman ; and some pity, too, for the girl who was kept in ignorance of her mother being alive ; and she sat with her hands clasped on her knees, regarding these two imaginary figures, as it were, and too much interested in them to remember that her counsel was being asked concerning them.

"Now, you see, Yolande," he continued, "it appears that one of the results of using those damnable—I beg your pardon—I really beg your pardon—I mean those—those poisonous drugs, is that the will entirely goes. The poor wretches have no command over themselves ; they live in a dream ; they will promise anything—they will make the most solemn vows of abstinence—and be quite unable to resist the temptation. And the law practically puts no check on the use of these fiendish things ; even when the public-houses are closed the chemist's shop is open. Now, Yolande, I have a kind of theory or project with regard to that poor woman—I don't know whether the doctors would approve of it—but it is a fancy I have : let us suppose that that poor wretch of a mother does not quite understand that her daughter has grown up to be a woman—most likely she still regards her as a child—that is a very common thing—at all events, she is not likely to know anything as to what her daughter is like. And suppose that this daughter were to go to her mother and declare herself : do you not think that that would be enough to startle her out of her dream ; and do you not think that in the bewilderment of finding their relations reversed—the child grown to be a woman assuming a kind of protection and authority and com-

mand over the broken-down creature—she might be got to rely on that help, and, encouraged and strengthened by constant care and affection, to retrieve herself? Don't you think it is possible? To be startled out of that dream by shame and horror; then the wonder of having that beautiful daughter her champion and protectress; then the continual reward of her companionship: don't you think it is possible?"

"Oh yes—oh yes, surely!" said the girl. "Surely you are right!"

"But then, Yolande, I am afraid you don't understand what a terrible business it will be. It will demand the most constant watchfulness; for these drugs are easy to get; and people who use them are very cunning. And it will require a long time—perhaps years—before one could be certain that the woman was saved. Now look at it from the other side. Might not one say, 'That poor woman's life is gone, is done for: why should you destroy this other young life in trying to save a wreck? Why should you destroy one happy human existence in trying to rescue the mere remnant of another human existence that would be worthless and useless even if you succeed? Why should not the girl live her own life in peace and happiness?'"

"But that is not what you would say; that is not what you think," she said, confidently. "And do you ask what the girl would think?—for I can tell you that. Oh yes, I can tell you—she would despise any one who offered her such a choice!"

"But she would be in ignorance, Yolande; she would know nothing about it."

"She ought not to be in ignorance, then! Why do they not tell her? Why not ask herself what she will do? Ah, and all this time the poor woman left to herself—it was not right—it was not just!"

"But she has not been left to herself, Yolande. Everything has been tried—everything but this. And that is why I have come to ask you what you think a girl in that position would naturally do. What would she do if she were told?"

"There cannot be a doubt," she exclaimed. "Oh, there cannot be a doubt!—You—I know what your feeling is—what your opinion is. And yet you hesitate? Why? Go; and you will see what her answer will be!"

"Do you mean to say, Yolande," he said, deliberately, and regarding her at the same time, "that you have no doubt whatever? You say I am to go and ask this young girl to sacrifice her life—or it may be only a part, but that the best part, of her life—on this chance of rescuing a poor broken-down creature——"

"*Her mother*," said Yolande.

"What will she think of me, I wonder," he said, absently. The answer was decisive.

"If she is the girl that you say, oh, I know how she will be grateful to you. She will bless you. She will look on you as the best and dearest of her friends, who had courage when the others were afraid, who had faith in her."

"Yolande," said he, almost solemnly, "you have decided for yourself."

"I?" she said, in amazement.

"Your mother is alive."

She uttered a sharp cry—of pain, it seemed.

"My mother—my mother—*like that!*"

For a time this agony of shame and horror deprived her of all power of utterance; the blow had fallen heavily. Her most cherished and beautiful ideals lay broken at her feet; in their place was this stern and ghastly picture that he had placed before her mental eyes. He had not softened down any of the details; it was necessary that she should know the truth. And she had been so much interested in the story, as he patiently put it before her, that now she had but little difficulty—alas! she had no difficulty at all—in placing herself in the position of that imaginary daughter, and realising what she had to face.

He waited. He had faith in her courage; but he would give her time. This was a sudden thing to happen to a girl of nineteen.

"Well," she said, at length, in a low voice, "I will go."

Her hands were tightly clenched together; but she showed no symptom of faltering. Presently she said, in the same steady, constrained way—

"I will go at once. Does papa know you were coming here to-day to tell me?"

"Yes. He could not do it himself, Yolande. He has

suffered fearfully during these long years in order to hide this from you ; he thought it would only pain you to know—that you could do no good.”

“What induced him to change his mind?”

He was embarrassed ; he had not expected the question. She glanced at his face.

“Was that the objection at Lynn Towers?” she said, calmly.

“No, Yolande, no ; it was not. I daresay Lord Lynn does not quite approve of your father’s politics ; but that has nothing to do with you.”

“Then it was your idea that I should be told?”

“Well,” said he, uneasily, “possibly your father imagined that Archie Leslie might not like—might think he had been unfairly treated if he were not told—and then, I was his friend, don’t you see, and they mentioned the matter to me—and—and—being an outsider, I was reluctant to interfere at first—but then, when they spoke of telling you, I said to myself that I knew, or I fancied I knew, what a girl like Yolande Winterbourne would be sure to do in such circumstances—and so I thought I would venture the suggestion to them, and—and if it turned out to be so, then I might be of some little help to you.”

That was cleverly done ; he had not told her it was the Master of Lynn who had insisted on that disclosure.

And now she was gathering her courage to her ; though still she maintained a curious sort of constrained reserve, as though she were keeping a tight hold over her feelings.

“I suppose,” she said, slowly, “it is your idea I should go there—alone.”

“If you are not afraid, Yolande,—if you are not afraid !” he said, anxiously.

“I am not afraid.”

“Don’t you see, Yolande,” he said, eagerly, “if you go accompanied by a stranger, she may think it is a solicitor—people in that weak mental state are usually suspicious ; and if you go with your father, she would probably only consider it a repetition of former interviews, that came to nothing. No ; it is the sudden appearance of her daughter that will startle her into consciousness of what she is. Then don’t mind those people she is with. Don’t be afraid of them. They dare not

detain her. You will have a policeman waiting outside ; and your maid will go into the house with you, and wait in the passage. You will have to assume authority. Your mother may be a bit dazed, poor woman ; you must take her with you ; let no one interfere. Now, do you think you have nerve for that—all by yourself?"

"Oh yes, I think so," she said, calmly. "But I must begin at the beginning. I cannot leave the lodge without putting some one in charge——"

"I will send up Mrs. Bell—she will be delighted."

"Ah, will you?" she said, with a quick glance of gratitude breaking through her forced composure. "If only she would be so kind as to do that ! She knows everything that is wanted——"

"Don't trouble yourself about that for a moment," he said. "Mrs. Bell will be delighted—there is nothing she would not do for you."

"Then I must take away my things with me ; perhaps I shall not see Allt-nam-ba again ; my life will be altered now. Where do I go when I reach London?"

"I should say the hotel your father and you were at once or twice, in Albemarle Street. But you are sure, Yolande, you would rather not have some one go with you to London, and see you to your quarters in the hotel ? Why, I would myself—with pleasure ; for my assistant Dalrymple gets on very well in the school now. Or Mr. Shortlands, he is going south soon, is he not ? I would not ask your father ; it would be too painful for him."

"No," she said, "I do not want any one. Jane and I will do very well. Besides I could not wait for Mr. Shortlands. I am going at once."

"At once ! Surely you will take time to consider——"

"I am going to-morrow," she said, "if Mrs. Bell will be so kind as to come and take my place."

"Don't be so precipitate, Yolande," he said, with some anxiety. I have put all this before you for your consideration ; and I should feel I was burdened with a terrible responsibility if you were to do anything you might afterwards regret. Will you consult Mr. Shortlands?"

She shook her head.

“Will you take a week to think over it?”

“No; why?” she said, simply. “Did I not consider when you were telling me the story of this imaginary girl? Had I any doubt? No. I knew what she would decide. I know what I have decided. What use is there in delay? Ah, if there is to be the good come out of it that you have imagined for me, should I not haste? When one is perishing, you do not think twice if you can hold out your hand. Do you think that I regret—that I am sorry to leave a little comfort behind—that I am afraid to take a little trouble? Surely you do not think that of me. Why I am anxious to go now is to see at once what can be done—to know the worst or the best—to try. And now—I shall not be speaking to my papa about it; that would only give pain—will you tell me what I should do, in all the small particulars? I am not likely to forget.”

That he could do easily; for he had thought enough over the matter. He gave her the most minute instructions; guarding against this or that possibility; and she listened mutely and attentively, with scarcely the interruption of a question. Then at length he rose to say good-bye; and she rose too. He did not notice that, as she did so, her lips quivered for the briefest second.

He hesitated.

“If you are going to-morrow, Yolande,” said he, “I will see you as you pass. I will look out for you. I should like to say good-bye to you; it may be for a long time.”

“It may, for always,” she said, with her eyes cast down; “perhaps I shall never be back here again.”

“And I am sending you away into all this trouble and grief. How can I help knowing that it is I who am doing it? And perhaps, day after day, and night after night, I shall be trying to justify myself—when I am thinking over it, and wondering where you are; and perhaps I shall not succeed very well.”

“But it is I who justify you—that is enough,” she said, in a low voice. “Did I not decide for myself? And I know that in your heart you think I am doing right; and if you are afraid for me—well, that is only kindness—such as that you have always shown to me——”

Here she stopped; and he did not see that her hands

were clenched firm, as she stood there opposite him, with her eyes cast down.

"And whatever happens. Yolande—you may be in pain and grief—and perhaps all you may endure may only end in bitter disappointment—well, I hope you will not imagine that I came to you with my proposal unthinkingly. I have thought over it night and day. I did not come to you off-hand——"

"Ah, then," she said quickly, "and you think it is necessary to justify yourself—you, to me, as if I did not know you as well as I know myself! Do you think I do not know you and understand you because I am only a girl?" Her forced composure was breaking down altogether, she was trembling somewhat, and now there were tears running down her cheeks, despite herself; though she regarded him bravely, as if she would not acknowledge that. "And you asked me what the girl you spoke of would think of the man who came to her and showed her what she should do? Did I not answer? I said she would know then that he was the one who had faith in her; that she would give him her gratitude; that she would know who was her best and truest friend. And now, just as you and I are about to say good-bye, perhaps for ever, you think it is necessary for you to justify yourself to me—you, my best friend—my more than friend——"

And then—ah, who can tell how such things happen, or which is to bear the blame?—his arms were round her trembling figure, and she was sobbing violently on his breast. And what was this wild thing she said in the bewilderment of her grief—"Oh, why, why was my life given away before I ever saw you?"

"Yolande," said he, with his face very pale, "I am going to say something, for this is our last meeting. What can a few words matter—my darling!—if we are never to see each other again? I love you. I shall love you while I have life. Why should I not say it, for this once? I blinded myself; I tried to think it friendship—friendship, and the world was just filled with light whenever I saw you! It is our last meeting; you will let me say this for once—how can it harm you?"

She shrank out of his embrace; she sank down on the

couch there, and turned away her head and hid her face in her hands.

“Go, go!” she murmured. “What have I done? For pity’s sake go—and forget! Forget!”

He knelt down by the side of the couch; and he was paler than ever now.

“Yolande, it is for you to forget—and forgive. I have been a traitor to my friend; I have been a traitor to you. You shall never see me again. God bless you!—and good-bye!”

He kissed her hair, and rose, and got himself out of the house. As he went down that wide strath, his eyes fixed on nothing, like one demented, and his mind whirling this way and that amid clouds of remorse and reproach and immeasurable pity—it seemed to him that he felt on his brow the weight of the brand of Cain.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PREPARATIONS.

AND as for her: she was stunned almost into unconsciousness by this shock of self-abasement and distress. She lay on the sofa, her face covered with her hands; she could not face the light. What was she then?—she who hitherto had been so fearless and so proud. A flirt, a jilt, a light-o’-love—that was how she saw herself; and then there was a kind of despair over the misery she had wrought, and a yearning to have him back to implore his pity and his forgiveness; and then sudden resolves to free herself in another direction, at any cost of penitence and humiliation. She began to compose hurried brief messages—though the throbbing brain and the shame-stricken soul could scarce decide between the fitness of them. These were some of them:—

“Dear Papa—I have gone away. Tell Archie not to think any more about me.—Yolande.”

And then again:—

"Dear Archie—I send you back the engagement-ring ; I am not worthy to be your wife. I am sorry if I have caused you any disappointment ; but you have less to regret than I have."

And then again—to one not named at all :—

"To-day I go away. Never think of me again, or of what has happened. Forgive me ; that is all."

And then she began to think—if this wild torture of suggestions could be called thinking—of the undertaking that lay before her ; and the thought of it was something of a relief. There would be an occupation, urgent, continuous, demanding all her attention ; in time, and in a measure, she might school herself to forget. Perhaps, if this duty turned out to be a very sad and painful one, it might be taken by those whom she had wronged as a sort of penance ? She was prepared to suffer. She thought she deserved to suffer. Had she not proved a traitor to the man whom she had promised to marry ? Had she not brought misery to this best and dearest of all her friends—to this fine and noble nature that she had learned to know ; and that by her idleness and carelessness—the carelessness of a vain coquette and light-o'-love, heedless of consequences ? What would he think of her ? She could only vaguely recall the reproaches he had heaped upon himself ; but she knew that he was in distress, and that she was the cause of it. And, perhaps, if there were trials in store for her, if there were suffering in store for her, perhaps he would never know that she rather welcomed that, and was content to receive her punishment ? Perhaps he would never know how grieved she was ? It was over and done, and past recall. And she knew that henceforth her life would be quite different to her.

How long she lay there in that misery of remorse and despair she probably never knew ; but at last she forced herself to rise. She was not thinking of her appearance ; she did not know that her face was haggard and pale ; that an expression never before there was there now ; that her eyes were no longer the eyes of a child. She was going away—this was all she was compelling herself to think about ; and there were preparations to be made. And so in a slow and mechanical fashion she began to put a few things together even in this drawing-

room ; although every other minute her heart seemed to stand still as she came upon some little trifle that was associated with him—something he had done for her, something that he had brought her, showing his continued solicitude and thoughtfulness and affection. Why had she not seen ? Why did she not understand ? And then she began to think of the evenings he had spent at the house, and of the walks they had had together down the wide valley ; and she began to know why it was that these evenings had seemed so rich in happy human sympathies, and why the valley had appeared so wondrous and beautiful, and why her life at Allt-nam-ba had had so strange and unnameable a charm thrown over it. And he—he had been blind, too. She knew that he could not have imagined it possible that he was betraying his friend ; otherwise he would have fled from the place. She was standing quite still now, her eyes distraught ; and she was trying to recall the very tones in which he had said, “I love you.” That was the misery of it, and the cause of her shame, and the just reason for her remorse and self-abasement ; and yet—and yet—somewhere or other deep down in her heart there was a curious touch of pride that she had heard those words. If circumstances had been different—to be approved, to have won the affection, to be loved by one like that ! And then a passion of self-contempt seized her ; and she said to herself : “You, to think yourself worthy of such a love ! You, who can allow yourself to think of such things, with that ring on your finger !”

This also was strange, that, amid all the preparations for departure that she was now mechanically making, she should be possessed by a singular anxiety that Mrs. Bell, when she came to Allt-nam-ba, should find the household arrangements in the most perfect order. Had she some vague hope or fancy, then, that some day or other, when she should be far enough away from Allt-nam-ba, and Gress, and Lynn, and not likely to see any one of them again, her name might be mentioned casually by this good woman, and mentioned, perhaps, with some slight word of approval ? When she drew out, for Mrs. Bell’s guidance, a list of her arrangements with the Inverness tradesmen, she was dissatisfied with the mere handwriting of it (for, indeed, her fingers trembled somewhat), and she destroyed it and wrote out another ; and that she destroyed,

and wrote out another—until the handwriting was fairly clear and correct.

Her maid Jane was a fool of a woman ; but even she could see that her young mistress was faint-looking, and even ill-looking ; and again and again she besought her to desist from these preparations, and to go and have some lunch, which awaited her in the dining-room.

“ You know, Miss,” said she, “ you can’t go before your papa comes home ; and then it would be far too late to catch the steamer. You can’t go before the morning ; and I am sure, Miss, you will be quite ill and unable to travel if you don’t eat something.”

Well, Yolande went into the dining-room, and sat down at the table ; but she could not eat or drink anything ; and in a minute or two she was back again in her bedroom superintending the packing of her trunks. However, she was in time compelled to desist. The mental agitation of the morning, combined with this want of food, produced the natural result ; she gradually acquired a violent headache, a headache so violent that further superintendence of packing or anything else was entirely out of the question. Now it was the literal fact that she had never had a headache in her life—except once, at the Château, when a large volume she was reaching for in the library fell and struck her—and she did not know what to do ; but she fancied that by tying a wet towel round her head she might lessen the throbbing of the temples ; and this she did, lying down the while. Jane stole out of the room, fancying her young mistress might now get some sleep. The girl was not thinking of sleep.

Mr. Winterbourne and John Shortlands were on their way back from the hill.

“ I scarcely know what has happened to-day,” Mr. Winterbourne was saying. “ All the time I have been thinking of our going back. And I know what I shall find when I go back—the wreck of the happiness that I have so carefully nursed all through these years. It is like hedging round a garden ; and growing flowers there ; and all at once, some morning, you find the place trampled down and a wilderness. I hope I am not unjust, Shortlands ; but I think he might have spared her.”

“Who?”

“Young Leslie. I think he might have spared her. It was not much. Don’t you think—out of consideration——”

“Nonsense, man. What young Leslie has done seems to me, on reflection, perfectly just, and right, and reasonable,” said John Shortlands, telling a lie in the calmest manner possible. “The young people ought not to be hampered in starting life. A little trouble now—what is that? And it will be better for you too, Winterbourne. You would have kept on worrying yourself. You would have been always apprehensive about something. You would have reproached yourself for not telling him.”

“I am not thinking of myself,” Yolande’s father said, rather wistfully. “I could have borne all that; I am used to it. It is about her I am thinking. I remember in Egypt, away up at that still place, wondering whether all her life might not be just as quiet and uneventful and happy as it was there.”

“The fact is, Winterbourne,” said John Shortlands, bluntly, “you are just mad about that child of yours; and you expect the world to be changed all on her account; whereas every reasonable being knows that she must take her chance of trouble as well as others. And this—what is this? Is it so great an affair? You don’t know yet whether she will follow out that suggestion of Melville’s. Perhaps she won’t. If you would rather she should not, no doubt she will abide by your wishes. By this time she has been told. The secret is at an end. Leslie has had what he wanted; what the devil more can he ask for?”

But the sharp asperity of this last phrase rather betrayed his private opinion; and so he added, quickly—

“However, as you say, she is more likely to go. Well, why not look at the brighter side of things? There is a possibility. Oh, you needn’t shake your head; when I look at the whole thing from Melville’s point of view, I can see the possibility. He’s a devilish long-headed fellow, that; and a devilish fine fellow, too; not many men would have bothered their heads as he has done. I wouldn’t. If you and I weren’t old friends, do you think I would have interfered? I’d have let you go on your own way. But now, old chap, I think you’ll find Yolande ready to go; and you’d better not make too much

fuss about it, and frighten the girl. I shall be in London ; I shall see she has plenty of money."

"It seems so inhuman," her father said, absently.

"What?"

"That I should remain here shooting ; and she allowed to go away there, alone."

"My dear fellow, she'll get on twenty times better without ye," said Shortlands, plainly. "It seems to me that what you say Melville pointed out to you was just the perfection of good advice ; you'll do well to abide by it."

"But he does not know Yolande as I do," her father said.

"He seems to have made a thundering good guess, anyway !"

"I don't mean that. He does not know how she has been brought up—always looked after and cared for. She has never been allowed to shift about for herself. Oh, as regards herself, I can see well enough that he imagines she has certain qualities ; and perhaps he thinks it rather fine to make experiments. Well, I don't. I don't see why Yolande should be made the victim of any experiment ; I am content with her as she is."

"You'd better see what she says about it herself."

When they reached the lodge, Yolande was not, as usual, standing in the porch to welcome them home from the hill.

"Please, sir," said the maid, "Miss Winterbourne has a headache, and says would you excuse her coming down to dinner?"

He stood irresolute for a second or two—obviously greatly disturbed ; then he slowly and thoughtfully went up the stairs, and gently knocked at the door of her room.

"May I come in, Yolande?"

She had just time to untie the wet towel from her head, to smooth her hair, and sit up in bed.

"Yes, papa."

He entered, went over and drew a chair near to her and sat down.

"I am sorry for you, Yolande," he said, in a low voice ; and his eyes were nervously bent on the ground.

"Why, papa?"

She spoke in quite a cheerful way ; and as he had not

suffered his eyes to meet hers, he was unaware how that cheerfulness was belied by the strange expression in them. She was forcing herself to make light of this matter ; she would not have him troubled. And perhaps, indeed, to her this was in truth a light matter, as compared with that tragic disclosure and its consequences, which seemed to have cut away from her, at once and for ever, the shining and rose-coloured years of her youth.

"If I erred, Yolande," said he, "in keeping all this back from you, I did it for the best."

"Do you need to say that to me, papa?" she answered, with some touch of reproach.

"I thought it would save you needless pain," said he ; and then, as he ventured to lift his eyes, he caught sight of the pale anguish-stricken face, and he nearly cried aloud in his sudden alarm, "Yolande, are you ill?"

"Oh no, papa," she said ; and she did try her best to look very cheerful. "I have a headache—that is all ; and it is not so bad as it was. I—I—have been seeing things packed, and making arrangements."

"You are going, Yolande?" he said, with a sinking of the heart.

"That, again, it is unnecessary for you to ask me," the girl said, simply.

"But not at once, Yolande?" said he, glancing at an open trunk. "Not at once?"

"To-morrow morning, papa," she answered. "Oh, but I assure you, you will be put to no trouble—no trouble at all. Mrs. Bell is coming from Gress to see everything right. And I have made out lists for her ; it is all arranged ; you will not know any difference——"

"Yolande, you will make me angry if you talk like that. What signifies our comfort? It is the notion of your going away by yourself——"

"Jane goes with me. That is all arranged also," she said. "I have no fear."

"Listen, now, Yolande. I don't disapprove of your going. We have tried everything, and failed ; if there is a chance of your succeeding—well, perhaps one might say it is your duty to go. Poor child, I would rather have had you know nothing

about it ; but that is all over now. Well, you see, Yolande, if you go, there must be no unnecessary risk or trouble about your going. I have been thinking that perhaps Mr. Melville may be a little too imaginative. He sees things strongly. And in insisting that you should go alone—why, there may be a danger that he has been carried away by a—by a—well, I don't know how to put it, except that he may be so anxious to have this striking appeal made to your poor mother as to be indifferent to ordinary precautions. Why should you go friendless and alone? Why should I remain amusing myself here?"

"Because you would be of no use to me, papa," said she, calmly. "I know what I have to do."

"Why, then, should you not wait for a few days and travel south with Mr. Shortlands?"

"Oh, I must go at once, papa—at once!" she exclaimed. "I must go to-morrow. And Jane goes with me! Is it not simple enough?"

"Yolande, you cannot be left in London with absolutely no one to whom you can appeal. The least you must do is to take a letter to Lawrence and Lang. They will do anything you want; they will let you have what you want; if there is any hiring of lodgings or anything of that kind, they will send one of their clerks. You cannot be stranded in London without the chance of assistance. You must go to Lawrence and Lang."

"I may have to go to them—that also is arranged. But they must not interfere—they must not come with me—that was not Mr. Melville's idea," she said; though the pale face turned still paler as she forced herself to utter the name.

"Mr. Melville!" he said, angrily. "You seem to think the whole wisdom of the world is centred in Mr. Melville! I don't at all know that he was right in coming to put all this trouble on you. Perhaps he would not have been so quick if it had been his own sister, or his own daughter——"

Then a strange thing occurred. She had flung herself down on the pillow again, her face buried, her whole frame shaken by the sudden violence of her crying.

"Don't—don't—don't!" she sobbed, piteously. "Don't speak like that, papa! There is enough trouble—there is enough!"

"What is it, Yolande?" said he. "Well, no wonder your nerves have been upset. I wonder you have taken it so bravely. I will leave you now, Yolande; but you must try and come down to dinner."

Dinner was put on the table; but she did not make her appearance. A message was sent up to her; the answer was that she merely wished to have a cup of tea by and by. Jane, on being questioned, said that everything had been got ready for their departure the following morning; even to the ordering of the dog-cart for a particular hour.

"Yes," her father said to John Shortlands, as they sat rather silently at the dinner-table, "she seems bent on going at once. Perhaps it is because she is nervous and anxious, and wants to know the worst. She won't have any one with her; she is determined to keep to Melville's plan; though I wanted her to wait and go south with you. What a dreadful thing it would be if any harm were to befall her——"

"Why, what harm can befall her?" his friend said. "What is the journey to London?—nothing! She gets into the train at Inverness to-morrow at mid-day: the next morning she is in London. Then a cab takes her to the hotel: what more simple? The real risk begins after that; and it is then that your friend Melville insists that she should take the thing into her own hands. Well, dang me, if I'm afraid of the consequences. There's good grit in her. She hasn't had her nerve destroyed as you have. When the cob was scampering all over the place yesterday, and the groom couldn't get hold of him, did she run into the house? Not much. She waylaid him at the end of the bothy; and got hold of him herself, and led him to the stable-door. I don't think the lass has a bad temper; but I shouldn't like to be the one to put a finger on her against her will. Don't you fear. I can see where the bit of trouble, if there is to be any at all, will most likely come in; and I am not afraid. It's wonderful what women will do—ay, and weak women, too—in defence of those who have a claim on their affection. Talk about the tigress and her young; a woman's twice as bad, or twice as good, if you take it that way. I fancy some o' those poor devils of School Board inspectors must have a baddish time of it occasionally—I don't envy them. I tell you you needn't

be afraid, my good fellow. Yolande will be able to take care of herself. And I think Jack Melville has put her on to doing the right thing, whatever comes of it."

Yolande did not appear that night; she was too much distracted by her own thoughts; she did not wish to be confronted with questioning eyes. But she found time to write this brief note:—

"Tuesday night.

"DEAR MR. SHORTLANDS—As it is not likely I shall see you in the morning, for I am going away at a very early hour, I leave you this word of good-bye. And please, *please*, stay with papa as long as ever you conveniently can. Duncan assures me that it is now you will be beginning to have chances with the red-deer.—Yours affectionately,

"YOLANDE WINTERBOURNE."

And as to that other—the friend who was sending her forth on this mission—was she going away without one word of good-bye for him? She considered that, and did not sleep much that night.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"IHR MATTEN, LEBT WOHL!"

THE first pale clear glow of the dawn was just beginning to tell on the higher slopes of the hills when she arose; and all the house was asleep. The heart-searching of that long night had calmed her somewhat. Now she was chiefly anxious to get away—to seek forgetfulness of this sad discovery in the immediate duty that lay before her. And if sometimes the fear was forced upon her that neither for him nor for her was forgetfulness possible—well, it was not her own share of that suffering that she regarded with dismay. Nay, did she not rather welcome that as a punishment which she deserved—as a penance which might be counted to her in the due course of years? If this passage in her life was not to be obliterated, at least, and in the meantime, she would endeavour to close the chapter. She was going away from Allt-nam-ba; and from

the mistakes and miseries that had happened there. A new era in her life was opening before her; perhaps she would have less to reproach herself with in that.

In the silence of this pale clear morning she sat down and quickly wrote still another message of farewell, the terms of which she had carefully (and not without some smittings of conscience) studied during the long wakeful hours:—

"Allt-nam-ba, Wednesday morning.

"DEAR ARCHIE—A grave duty calls me suddenly away to the south. No doubt you can guess what it is; and you will understand how, in the meantime at least, all our other plans and arrangements must yield to it. Probably, as I am anxious to catch the early boat at Foyers, I may not see you to say good-bye; and so I send you this message.—From your affectionate
"YOLANDE."

She regarded this letter with much self-humiliation. It was not frank. Perhaps she had no right to write to him so, without telling him of what had happened the day before. And yet again, what time was there now for explanation; and perhaps, as the days, and the months, and the years went by, there might never be need of any explanation? Her life was to be all different now.

The household began to stir. There was a crackling of wood in the kitchen; outside Sandy could be heard opening the doors of the coach-house. Then Jane put in an appearance, to finally close her young mistress's portmanteaus. And then, everything having been got ready, when she went downstairs to the dining-room, she was surprised to find her father there.

"Why did you get up so early?" said she, in protest.

"Do you think I was going to let you leave without saying good-bye?" he answered. "You are looking a little better this morning, Yolande—but not well, not well. Are you sure you won't reconsider? Will you not wait a few days; accustom yourself to think of it; and then go, if you will go, with Mr. Shortlands?"

"Oh no, that is all over, papa," said she. "That is all settled. I am going this morning—now——"

"Now? Already?" he exclaimed.

"I wish to have a little time at Gress," she answered, calmly, "to explain all the arrangements to Mrs. Bell."

But he compelled her to sit down and have some hasty breakfast; while he remained at the window, anxious, disturbed, and yet for the most part silent. There was no doubt he regarded her going with an undefined dread; but he saw that it was no use to try to dissuade her—her purpose being so obviously settled and clear. There was another thing; he showed the greatest embarrassment in talking in any way whatever about the subject. He could not bring himself to mention his wife's name. To Yolande he had said "your poor mother"—but only once. He seemed unable to make this thing that he had hidden from her for so many years a topic of conversation.

And it was almost in silence, and with a face overshadowed with gloom, that he saw the last preparations made. He followed her out to the dog-cart. He himself would fasten the rugs round her knees—the morning being somewhat chilly. And when they drove away, he stood there for a long time regarding them; until the dog-cart disappeared at a turning of the road, and Yolande was gone. This, then, was the end of that peaceful security that he had hoped to find at Allt-nam-ba!

Yolande was not driving this morning; she had too many things to think of. But when they reached the bridge at the lower end of the loch, she told Sandy to stop, and took the reins.

"Here is a letter for Mr. Leslie," she said. "You need not take it up to the house; put it in the letter-box at the gate."

Then they drove on again. When they had climbed the hill, she looked over to Lynn Towers; but she could not make out any one at any of the windows. There were one or two stable-lads about the outhouses, but otherwise no sign of life. She was rather glad of that.

When she got to Gress, she saw that Mrs. Bell was in the garden behind the house, and thither she made her way. Yolande's face was pale; but her manner was quite calm and firm.

"Well, here are doings!" said the cheerful old lady. "And I was just hurrying on to get a few bit flowers for ye. 'Deed, ye're early this morning."

"It is very kind of you, Mrs. Bell; but please do not trouble. You expected me, then? Mr.—Mr. Melville told you?"

"That he did. And I'll just be delighted to be of any kind of service to ye that is possible. I'll be ready to go up to Allt-nam-ba by mid-day; and I'm thinking I'll take one o' the young lassies wi' me, in case there's any needcessity for a helping hand. The other one will do very well to look after this place when both Mr. Melville and me are away."

"But is he going? Is he going away?" said Yolande, with a sudden alarm.

"I think he is; though it's no my place to ask," said Mrs. Bell, placidly. "Last night I saw he was putting some things in order, in the house. And I jalouse he stopped in the laboratory the whole night through, for he never was in his bed; and this morning I caught a glint o' him going out before any o' us was up. I daresay he was off to one o' the moorland lochs, to have a last day at the trout belike."

"He is not here, then?" the girl exclaimed, with dismay in her eyes. "Mrs. Bell, I must see him! Indeed, I cannot go until I have seen him!"

"Wha kens where he may be now?" said the old lady, good-humouredly (for she clearly had no idea that there was anything tragic occurring around her). "There never was such a man for wandering about the country like a warlock. Many a fright has he gi'en the shepherds, when they came upon him in the corries that no ordinary Christian ever goes near."

"But you must send for him, Mrs. Bell!" said Yolande, with that forced calmness of demeanour almost breaking down. "I cannot go away without bidding him good-bye!"

The old woman stopped arranging the flowers she had gathered.

"I canna send to search the whole county o' Inverness," she said, reflectively, "and wha kens where he may be? If he's no back by school-time, he's off for the day—ay, and without a biscuit in his pocket, I'll be warrant. But it's just possible he has only gaen doon to the burn to get a trout or two; I can send one o' the lassies to see. And though I've never kenned him to go up to the water-wheel at this time o' the morning, I canna gang wrang in making the bell ring. If you'll just hold the flowers for a minute, my dear young leddy, I'll go into the house and see what can be done."

She held the flowers mechanically ; she did not look at them ; her eyes were "otherwhere." But when Mrs. Bell came back, she recalled herself ; and, with such calmness as she could command, she showed the old lady all the arrangements she had made with regard to the household of Allt-nam-ba, and gave her the lists that she had carefully drawn out. And Mrs. Bell would hear of no such thing as thanks or gratitude ; she said people were well off who could be of any little service to them they liked ; and intimated that she was proud to do this for the sake of the young lady who had been kind enough to take notice of her.

"And so you are going away for a while," said the old Scotchwoman, cheerfully. "Ay, ay. But coming back soon again, I hope. Indeed, my dear young leddy, if it wasna a kind o' presumption on my part, I would say to ye, as they say in the old ballad, 'O, when will ye be back again, my hinny and my dear?' For, indeed, since ye came to Allt-nam-ba, it has just been something to gladden an auld woman's een."

"What is the ballad, Mrs. Bell?" Yolande said, quickly. She wished to evade these friendly inquiries. And already she was beginning to wonder whether she had enough strength and courage to force herself to go without seeing him and saying this last word to him.

"The ballad? Oh, that was the ballad o' young Randal," said Mrs. Bell, in her good-natured, garrulous way. "Maybe ye never heard that one?—

'Young Randal was a bonnie lad, when he gaed awa',
A braw, braw lad was he, when he gaed awa'.'

That is how it begins ; and then they a' come doon to see him ride off—his father and his mother, and his two sisters ; but, as ye may imagine,

'His bonny cousin Jean lookit o'er the castle wa',
And far aboon the lave let the tears doon fa'.'

Then it goes on—

"O when will ye be back again?" sae kindly did she speir ;
"O when will ye be back again, my hinnie and my dear?"
"As soon as I have won enough o' Spanish gear
To dress ye a' in silks and lace, my dear."

'That was the way o' those times, and mony a sair heart was the consequence. Will I tell ye the rest o' the story?"

"Oh yes, Mrs. Bell, if you please," said Yolande; though now she was scanning the vacant hillsides with a wistful and troubled eye. Was he not coming, then? Must she go away without that last word?

"Ye see, my young leddy, the story jumps over a good many years now, and he comes back to seek out his true love Jean."

"Ah yes," said Yolande, with more of interest, "to see whether she has been faithful to him, is it not? And of course she is. It is so easy for one to remain faithful—in a ballad, where nothing happens but the fancy of the poet. And then, if she was not faithful, who would write about her? She would be contemptible—that is all."

"No so fast, my dear young leddy, no so fast. Just listen to the story:—

'Young Randal was an altered man when he came hame,
A sair altered man was he when he came hame,
Wi' a star on his breast and a Sir to his name,
And wi' gray, gray locks Sir Randal came hame.

He rode to the castle, and he rispit at the ring,
And down came our lady to bid him ride in;
And round her bonnie bairnies were playin' on the green:
"Can this auld wife be my true love Jean?"

"And whatna dour auld carle is this?" quoth the dame,
"Sae griff and sae stiff, sae feckless and sae lame?"
Quoth he: "My bonny leddy, were ye sweet Jeanie Graham?"
"Indeed, good sir, ye have guessed my very name."

O! dool on the wars in the High Germanie!
And dool on the poortith o' our ain countrie!
And dool on the heart that unfaithful can be!—
For they've wrecked the bravest man in the whole countrie!"¹

Ye see it's a sad story enough; but I'm no sure whether to blame the wars in the High Germanie, or the poverty o' the old Scotch families, or the young lass changing her mind. Maybe if she had been less anxious for silks and lace, and maybe if

¹ Probably this version of the ballad is very imperfect, as it is put down here from memory.

he had been less anxious to hae a Sir to his name, he might hae bided at home and married her, and lived happily enough. It's the way o' young people never to be satisfied. And here is Mr. Melville going away just when everything was ready for his taking back the land that belonged to his own people and settling down on it as he ought."

"Perhaps he will not go—perhaps he is not going, Mrs. Bell!" she said, in a despairing kind of way; for well she knew, if he were indeed going, what was the cause.

Then she looked at her watch. Well, she had still about fifteen minutes to spare; and she was determined to stay till the last moment if it were needful. But there was no figure coming along the road; no living thing visible on these vacant hillsides; nor a sign of life along the wide moorland of the valley. She was grateful for Mrs. Bell's talking; it lessened the overstrain of the suspense somehow; she had to force herself to listen, in a measure. And again and again she expressed the hope that there must be a mistake—that Mr. Melville was not really going away.

"It's no my place to ask," the old lady said, doubtfully, "but he had a long talk when he came home yesterday wi' the lad Dalrymple, and I jalouse it was about his being able to carry on the school by himself. It's just that vexatious, my dear young leddy! and yet it canna be helped. I darena say a word. He's a headstrong man, and he's to be managed only wi' a good deal o' skill; and if he thought I was any kind o' encumbrance, or expected him to do this, that, or the other, he would be off in a gliff. But the vexatiousness o't to be sure! It was only the day before yesterday that I wrote to the lawyers again. I'm no gaun to tell ye, my young leddy, what they said about the price o' Monaglen, for it might get about, and I'm no wanting him to ken what I paid for it, if I get it. But I found I could easy buy it, and have a good nest-egg for him besides; besides my own £220 a year or thereabouts; and sae I wrote to they lawyers just asking them in a kind o' way to get me the refusal of the place for a freend o' mine. And then yesterday morning I began and argued wi' myself. I coveted the place, that's the truth. And says I, 'Kirsty, what's the use o' being ower cunning? If ye want to buy Monaglen, tell them. A braw thing now if it were to slip

through your fingers, and be snappit up by somebody else ; wadna ye be a disappointed woman a' the days o' your life?' And so, as second thochts are best, I just sat down and told them plump and plain that if Monaglen was to be got for that, here was a woman that would take it for that ; and telled them to make the bargain, and drive a nail into it there and then ; and that a' the other things—a' the whigmaleeries they invent just to make poor folk pay money—could be settled after. And to think o' him going away the now, just when the night's post or maybe the morn's night's post is almost sure to bring me a telegram—I declare it's too provokin'!"

"But perhaps he is not going away," said Yolande, gently. And then she added, suddenly, and with her face grown a deadly white : "Mrs. Bell, that is Mr. Melville coming down the hill. I wish to speak a word or two to him by himself."

"Oh yes, yes, why not?" said Mrs. Bell, cheerfully. "I am just going indoors to put a bit string round the flowers for ye. And there's a wee bit basket, too, ye maun take ; I made a few sweets, and comfits, and such things, for ye last night, that'll help to amuse ye on the journey."

She did not hear ; she was regarding him as he approached. His features were as pale as her own ; his lips were thin and white. When he came to her, he stood before her, with his eyes cast down, like one guilty. The pallor of his face was frightful.

"I have come because you sent for me," he said. "But there is nothing you can say to me that I have not said to myself."

"Do you think I have come to reproach you? No. It is I who have to bear the blame," she answered with apparent calmness. Then she added : "I—I sent for you because I could not go away without a word of good-bye."

Here she stopped, fearful that her self-possession would desert her. Her hands were tightly clenched ; and unconsciously she was nervously fingering her engagement ring.

"I do not see," she said, speaking in a measured way, as if to make sure she should not break down, "why the truth should not be said between us—it is the last time. I did not know ; you did not know ; it was all a misfortune ; but I ought to have known—I ought to have guarded myself—it is

I who am to blame. Well, if I have to suffer, it is no matter ; it is you that I am sorry for——”

“Yolande, I cannot have you talk like that !” he exclaimed.

“One moment,” she said—and strangely enough her French accent seemed more marked in her speech, perhaps because she was not thinking of any accent. “One moment. When I am gone away, do not think that I regret having met you and known you. It has been a misfortune for you ; for me, no. It has been an honour to me that you were my friend, and an education, also ; you have shown me what this one or that one may be in the world ; I had not known it before ; you made me expect better things. It was you who showed me what I should do ; do not think that I shall forget what I owe you ; whatever happens I will try to think of what you would expect from me ; and that will be my ambition. I wished to say this to you before I went away,” said she, and now her fingers were trembling somewhat, despite her enforced calmness. “And also that—that, if one cannot retrieve the past, if one has the misfortune to bring suffering on——”

“Yolande, Yolande,” said he, earnestly, and he looked up and looked into her eyes, “do not speak of it—do not think of it any more ! Put it behind you. You are no longer a girl ; you are a woman ; you have a woman’s duties before you. Whatever is past, let that be over and gone. If any one is to blame, it has not been you. Look before you ; forget what is behind ; do you know that it is not a light matter you have undertaken ?”

He was firmer than she was ; he regarded her calmly—though still his face was of a ghastly paleness.

She hesitated for a moment or two ; then she glanced around.

“I wish you to—to give me a flower,” she said, “that I may take it with me.”

“No,” he said, at once. “No. Forget everything that has happened here, except the duty you owe to others.”

“That I have deserved,” she said, in a low voice. “Good-bye.”

She held out her hand. He took it and held it ; and there was a great compassion in his eyes. To her they seemed glorified eyes, the eyes of a saint, full of a sad and yearning pity.

"Yolande," said he, and the tones of his voice seemed to reach her very heart; "I have faith in you. I shall hear of you. Be worthy of yourself. Now, God bless you, and good-bye!"

"*Adieu! adieu!*" she murmured; and then, white-faced and all trembling, but still dry-eyed and erect, she got through the house somehow, and out to the front, where Mrs. Bell was awaiting her by the side of the dog-cart.

When she had driven away, Mrs. Bell remained for a minute or two looking after the departing vehicle—and, perhaps, rather regretfully too, for she had taken a great liking to this bright young English lady who had come into these wilds; but presently she was recalled from her reveries or regrets by the calling of Mr. Melville. She went into the house at once.

"Now, Mrs. Bell," said he (and he seemed in an unusual hurry), "do you think one of the girls could hunt out for me the waterproof coat that has the strap attached to it for slinging over the shoulders? And I suppose she could pack me some bit of cold meat, or something of the kind, and half a loaf in a little parcel?"

"Dear me, sir, I will do that myself; but where are ye going, sir, if I may ask?"

The fact was that it was so unusual for Jack Melville to take any precautions of this kind—even when he was starting for a long day's fishing on some distant moorland loch—that Mrs. Bell instantly jumped to the conclusion that he was bent on some very desperate excursion.

"Where am I going?" he said. "Why, across the hills to Kingussie, to catch the night-train to London."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"DIR, O STILLES THAL, GRUSS ZUM LETZTENMAL!"

THE train roared and jangled through the long black night; and always before her shut but sleepless eyes rose vision after vision of that which she was leaving for ever behind—her girlhood. So quiet and beautiful, so rich in affection and

kindness, that appeared to her now ; she could scarce believe that it was herself she saw, in those recurrent scenes, so glad and joyous and light-hearted. That was all over. Already it seemed far away. She beheld herself walking with her father along the still valley, in the moonlight ; or out on the blue waters of the loch, with the sun hot on the gunwale of the boat ; or away up on the lonely hillsides, where the neighbourhood of the watercourses was marked by a wandering blaze of gold—widespread masses of the yellow saxifrage ; or seated at the head of the dinner-table, with her friends laughing and talking ; and all that life was grown distant now. She was as one expelled from Paradise. And sometimes, in spite of herself—in spite of all her wise and firm resolves—her heart would utter to itself a sort of cry of despair. Why did he refuse her that bit of a flower to take away with her ? It was so small a thing. And then she thought of the look of his eyes as he regarded her ; of the great pity and tenderness shining there ; and of the words of courage and hope that he had spoken to her as she left. Well, she would show herself worthy of his faith in her. She would force away from her those idle regrets over a too-beautiful past. A new life was opening before her ; she was content to accept whatever it might bring. Who could grudge to her this long, last review of the life she was leaving for ever ? Farewell—farewell ! She was not even carrying away with her a bit of a leaf or a blossom, to awaken memories, in the after time, of the garden in which she had so often stood in the white clear air, with the sunlight all around her. Well, it was better so. And perhaps in the new life that she was entering she would find such duties and occupations as would effectually prevent the recurrence of this long night's torture—this vision-building out of the past, this inexplicable yearning, this vain stretching out of the hands to that she was leaving for ever.

Towards morning she slept a little, but not much ; however, on the first occasion of her opening her eyes, she found that the gray light of the new day was around her. For an instant a shock of fear overcame her—a sudden sense of helplessness and affright. She was so strangely situated ; she was drawing near the great, dread city ; she knew not what lay before her ; and she felt so much alone. Despite herself, tears began to

trickle down her face, and her lips were tremulous. This new day seemed terrible, and she was helpless—and alone.

“Dear me, Miss,” said Jane, happening to wake up at this moment, “what is the matter?”

“It is nothing,” her young mistress said. “I—I have scarcely slept at all these two nights, and I feel rather weak and—and—not very well. It is no matter.”

But the tears fell faster now; and this sense of weakness and helplessness completely overpowered her. She fairly broke down.

“I will tell you what it is,” she sobbed, in a kind of recklessness of despair. “It is that I have undertaken to do what is beyond me. I am not fit for it. They have asked too much of me. It is beyond what I can do. What can I do?—when I feel that I should be happy if I could only lie down and die, and be the cause of no more trouble to any one!”

The maid was very much startled by these words, though she little guessed the cause of them. And indeed her young mistress very speedily—and by a force of will that she did not suspect herself of possessing—put an end to this half-hysterical fit. She drew herself up erect; she dried her eyes; and she told Jane that as soon as they got to the hotel she would go to bed for an hour or two and try to get some sleep; for that really this long fit of wakefulness had filled her head with all sorts of ridiculous fancies.

And that was the last sign of weakness. Pale her face might be, as she set about the undertaking of this duty; but she had steeled her heart. Fortunately, when they got to the hotel, and when she had had some breakfast, she was able to snatch an hour or two’s sound and refreshing sleep in the silence of her own room; and when she reappeared even the dull-witted Jane noticed how much better and brisker she looked. Nay, there was even a kind of hopefulness and cheerfulness in the way she set about making her preparations. And first of all she told Jane fully and frankly of the errand on which she had come to London; and this, as it turned out, was a wise thing to do; for the good Jane regarded the whole situation, and her probable share in the adventure, with a stolid self-sufficiency which was as good as any courage. Oh, she

said, she was not afraid of such people ! Probably she knew better how to manage them than a young lady would. They wouldn't frighten her ! And she not obscurely hinted that, if there was any kind of incivility going on, she was quite capable of giving as good as she got.

Yolande had resolved, among other things, that, while she would implicitly obey Mr. Melville's instructions about making that appeal to her mother entirely unaided and unaccompanied, she might also prudently follow her father's advice and get such help as was necessary, with regard to preliminary arrangements, from his solicitors ; more especially as she had met one of those gentlemen two or three times, and so far was on friendly terms with him. Accordingly, one of the first things she did was to get into a cab, accompanied by her maid, and drive to the offices of Lawrence and Lang in Lincoln's-inn-fields. She asked for Mr. Lang ; and by and by was shown into that gentleman's room. He was a tall elderly person, with white hair, a shrewd thin face, and humorous good-natured smile.

"Take a seat, Miss Winterbourne," said he. "Very lucky you came now. In another ten minutes I should have been off to seek you at the —— Hotel ; and we should have crossed each other."

"But how did you know I was at the —— Hotel ?" she said, with a stare of astonishment.

"Oh, we lawyers are supposed to know everything," he answered, good-naturedly. "And I may tell you that I know of the business that has brought you to London ; and that we shall be most happy to give you all the assistance in our power."

"But how can you know ?" the girl said, bewildered. "It was only the day before yesterday I decided to go ; and it was only this morning I reached London. Did my papa write to you, then, without telling me ?"

"My dear young lady, if I were to answer your questions, you would no longer believe in the omniscience of lawyers !" he said, with his grave smile. "No, no ; you must assume that we know everything. And let me tell you that the step you are taking, though it is a bold one, deserves to be successful ; perhaps it will be successful because it is a bold one. I hope

so. But you must be prepared for a shock. Your mother has been ill."

"Ah!" said Yolande—but no more. She held her hands clasped.

"I say she *has* been ill," said this elderly suave person, who seemed to regard the girl with a very kindly interest. "Now she is better. Three weeks ago my clerk found her unable to sign the receipt that he usually brings away with him; and I was about to write to your father, when I thought I would wait a day or two and see; and fortunately she got a little better. However, you must be prepared to find her looking ill; and—and—well, I was going to say she might be incapable of recognising you; but I forgot. In the meantime we shall be pleased to be of every assistance to you in our power; in fact, we have been instructed to consider you as under our protection. I hope you find the —— Hotel comfortable?"

"Oh yes—oh yes," Yolande said, absently; she was not thinking of any hotel; she was thinking in what way these people could be of help to her.

"Of course," said he, "when you go to see your mother, I could send some one with you, if you wished it; or I would go with you myself, for that matter; but I understand that is not considered desirable."

"Oh no," said she; "I must go alone. I wish to see her alone."

"As for your personal safety," said he, "that need not alarm you. Your friends may be anxious about you, no doubt; but the very worst that can happen will be a little impertinence. You won't mind that. I shall have a policeman in plain clothes standing by; if your maid should consider it necessary, she can easily summon him to you. She will be inside; he outside; so you have nothing to fear."

"Then you know all how it has been arranged!" she exclaimed.

"Why, yes; it is our business here to know everything," said he, laughing, "though we are not allowed sometimes to say how we came by the information. Now what else can we do for you? Let me see. If your poor mother will go with you, you might wish to take her to some quiet seaside place, perhaps, for her health?"

"Oh yes ; I wish to take her away from London at once !" Yolande said, eagerly.

"Well, a client of ours has just left some lodgings at Worthing—in fact, we have recommended them, on one or two occasions, and we have been told that they gave satisfaction. The rooms are clean and nicely furnished, and the landlady is civil and obliging. She is a gentlewoman, in short, in reduced circumstances, but not over-reaching. I think you might safely take the rooms."

"Will you give me the address, if you please ?"

He wrote the address on a card, and gave it her.

"But do not trouble to write," said he ; "we will do that for you, and arrange terms."

"But I must go down to see the place first," said she. "I can go there and get back in one day—to-morrow—can I not ?"

"But why should you give yourself so much trouble ?" he said.

"What a daughter can do for her own mother, that is not called trouble," she answered, simply. "Is Worthing a large town ?"

"No ; not a large town. It is one of the smaller watering-places."

"But one could hire there a pony and a pony-chaise ?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And could one take the rooms and hire the pony and pony-chaise conditionally ?"

"I don't quite understand you."

"Could one say, 'Yes, I shall want these most likely ; but if I telegraph to you to-morrow or next day that I do not want them, then there is no bargain and there is nothing to pay' ?"

"I have no doubt they would make that arrangement with you. That would be merely reserving the refusal for you for a certain number of days."

"Two days at the most," said Yolande, who seemed to have studied this matter—even as she used to study the details of her future housekeeping at Allt-nam-ba when she was sitting on the deck of the great steamer with the Mediterranean Sea around her.

"May I presume to ask," said he, "whether you are

sufficiently supplied with money? We have no instructions from your father; but we shall be pleased if you consider us your bankers."

"I have only eight or nine pounds," said she, "in money; but also I have three blank cheques which my papa signed: that is enough, is it not?"

"Well, yes, I should say that was enough," he remarked, with a perfectly subdued irony. "But those blank cheques are dangerous things, if you will permit me to say so. I would strongly advise you, my dear Miss Winterbourne, to destroy them; and to send to us for such sums as you may want from time to time. That would be much the safer plan. And if there is any other particular in which we can be of the least assistance to you, you will please let us know. We can always send some one to you, and a telegram from Worthing only costs a shilling. As we have received such strict injunctions about looking after you, we must keep up our character as your guardian."

"I thought you said my papa had not sent you any instructions?" Yolande exclaimed again.

"About the cheques, my dear young lady," said he, promptly.

"Then I wish you to tell me something of those people—I wish to know who and what they are."

"I think, Miss Winterbourne," said he, gravely, "that the information would not edify you much."

"But I wish to know," said she; "I wish to know the sort of people one must expect to find there."

"The facts are simple, then. He is a drunken scoundrel, to put the matter shortly. I believe he was once in a fairly good position—I rather think he was called to the Bar; but he never practised. Betting on races and drink finished him, between them. Then he tried to float a bit by marrying the proprietress of a public-house—an illiterate woman; but he drank through her money, and the public-house, and everything. Now they are supposed to let out this house in rooms; but, as that would involve trouble, my own impression is they have no lodgers but your mother, and are content to live on the very ample allowance that we are instructed to pay her monthly. Well, no doubt, they will be very angry if you

succeed in taking away from them their source of income ; and the man, if he is drunk, may be impertinent ; but that is all you have to fear. I would strongly advise you to go in the evening. Then the presence of the policeman in the street will not arouse suspicion ; and if there should be any trifling disturbance it will be less likely to attract the notice of bystanders. Might I ask—please forgive me if I am impertinent”—he said, “but I have known all about this sad story from the beginning, and I am naturally curious—may I ask whether the idea of your going to your mother, alone, and taking her away with you, alone, was a suggestion of your father’s?”

“It was not,” said she, with downcast eyes. “It was the suggestion of a friend whose acquaintanceship—whose friendship—we made in the Highlands—a Mr. Melville.”

“Ah !” said he ; and he glanced at a card that was lying before him on the table. “It is bold—bold,” he added, musingly. “One thing is certain, everything else has failed. My dear young lady, I am afraid, however successful you may be, your life for some time to come will not be as happy and cheerful as one could wish for one of your age.”

“That I am not particular about,” said Yolande, absently.

“However, in a matter of this kind, it is not my place to advise : I am a servant only. You are going down to Worthing to-morrow ; I will give you a list of trains there and back, to save you the trouble of hunting through a time-table. You will be back in the evening. Now, do you think it desirable that I should get this man whom I mean to employ in your service to hang about the neighbourhood of the house to-morrow, just to get some notion of the comings and goings of the people?”

“I think it would be most desirable,” Yolande said.

“Very well ; it shall be done. Let me see ; this is Thursday ; to-morrow you go to Worthing ; could you call here on Saturday to hear what the man has to say, or shall he wait on you at the——Hotel?”

“I would rather call here,” she said.

“Very well ; and what hour would be most convenient?”

“Ten—is it too soon?”

“Not at all,” said he, jotting down a memorandum on a

diary before him. "Now one thing more. Will you oblige me by burning those cheques ; I will write to your father, and take the responsibility."

"If you think it right, I will," she said, "as soon as I go back to the hotel."

"And here," he continued, going to a safe and fetching out some Bank of England notes, "is £25 in £5 notes ; it is not so serious a matter if one of those should go astray. Please put these in your purse, Miss Winterbourne ; and when you want any further sums, you have only to write to us."

She thanked him, and rose, and bade him good-bye.

"Good-bye, Miss Winterbourne," said he, in a very friendly way ; "and please to remember that although, of course, all the resources of our firm are at your disposal, as a matter of business, still I hope you may count on us for something more than that, if there is any way we can help you—I mean in a private and personal way. If any such occasion should arise, please remember that your father and I were friends together in Slagpool five-and-thirty years ago ; and anything that I can do for his daughter will be a great pleasure to me."

As she left, she thought that London did not seem to be, after all, such a terrible place to be alone in. Here was protection, guardianship, friendship, and assistance put all around her at the very outset. There were no more qualms or sinkings of the heart now. When she got outside, it suddenly occurred to her that she would like to go away in search of the street in which her mother lived, and reconnoitre the house. Might there not be some chance of her coming out—the day was fairly fine for London ? And how strange to see her mother walking before her. She felt sure she should recognise her. And then—perhaps—what if one were suddenly to discard all preparations ?—what if she were to be quickly caught, and carried off, and transferred to the safety of the — Hotel before any one could interfere ?

But when she had ordered the cabman to drive to Oxford Circus, and got into the cab, along with Jane, she firmly put away from her all these wild possibilities. This undertaking was too serious a matter to be imperilled by any rashness. She might look at the street, at the house, at the windows ; but not if her mother were to come out and pass her by,

touching her skirts even, would she declare herself. She was determined to be worthy of the trust that had been placed in her.

At Oxford Circus they dismissed the cab, and walked some short distance until they found the place they were in search of—a dull, respectable-looking, quiet, misty little thoroughfare, lying just back from the continuous roar of Oxford Street. She passed the house once or twice, too, knowing it by its number; but there was no sign of life in it. The small curtained windows showed no one sitting there or looking out. She waited and waited; went to distant points, and watched; but, save for an occasional butcher's boy or postman, the street remained uniformly empty. Then she remembered that it was drawing towards the afternoon, and that poor Jane was probably starving; so she called another cab, and drove to the hotel.

Next day was a busy day—after that life of quietude far away among the hills. She got to Worthing about twelve; and went straight to the lodgings that had been recommended by Mr. Lang, which she found in one of the bright and cheerful-looking terraces fronting the sea. She was much pleased with the rooms, which were on the first floor—the sitting-room opening on to a balcony prettily decorated with flowers; and she also took rather a fancy to the little old lady herself, who was at first rather anxious and nervous, but who grew more friendly under the influence of Yolande's calm and patronising gentleness. Under the conditions mentioned to Mr. Lang, she took the rooms; and gave her name and address, and her father's name and address, adding, with the smallest touch of pride—

“Of course you know him by reputation.”

“Oh yes, indeed,” somewhat vaguely said this timid, pretty, little old lady, who was the widow of a clergyman, and whose sole and whole notion of politics was that the Radicals and other evil-disposed persons of that kind were plotting the destruction of the Church of England, which to her meant nothing more nor less than the swallowing up of the visible universe. “He is in Parliament, is he not?”

“Yes,” said Yolande; “and some people wish he were not there. He is a little too honest and outspoken for them.”

Next she went to a livery-stable keeper, and asked about

his terms for the hire of a pony and pony-carriage. These terms seemed to her reasonable, but they were not; for she was judging them by the Inverness standard, whereas that standard is abnormally high, for the reason that the Inverness livery-stable keepers have demands made on them for only two, or at most, three months in the year, and are quite content, for the other nine months, to lend out their large stock of horses for nothing to any of the neighbouring lairds or farmers who will take them and feed them. However, the matter was not a serious one.

The next morning she called at the office of Messrs. Lawrence and Lang, heard what the man who had been posted in that little thoroughfare had to say, and arranged that she should go alone to the house that evening at eight o'clock. She had no longer in her eyes the pretty timidity and bashfulness of a child; she bore herself with the demeanour of a woman.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ABDUCTION.

A FEW minutes before eight on that evening, in the thoroughfare just mentioned, a short thick-set man was standing by a lamp-post, either trying to read, or pretending to read, an evening newspaper by the dull yellow light. Presently a hansom cab drove up to the corner of the street and stopped there; and a taller and younger man got out and came along to the lamp-post.

"I would go a dozen yards nearer," said the new-comer.

"Very well, sir," said the other; and then he added: "The master of the house has just gone out, sir."

"So much the better," said the younger man, carelessly. "There will be the less bother—probably none at all. But you keep a little bit nearer, after the young lady has gone into the house."

"Very well, sir."

The new-comer apparently did not consider that any great vigilance or surveillance would be necessary; but all the same, while he still left the hansom at the corner of the street, he

walked along a few yards farther (glancing in passing at the windows of one of the houses), until he came to a narrow entry leading down into a courtyard; and there a step or two into the gloom of the little passage effectually hid him from sight.

Punctually at eight o'clock, a four-wheeled cab appeared and drew up; and Yolande got out, followed by her maid. Without delay or hesitation she crossed the pavement, and knocked at the door. A girl of about fifteen opened it.

"Is Mrs. Winterbourne within?" said Yolande, calmly.

The girl eyed her doubtfully.

"Y—es, Miss."

"I wish to see her, if you please."

"Y—es, Miss—if you wait for a moment I'll go and tell missis."

"No," said Yolande, promptly—and she passed into the lobby without further ado. "No; I will not trouble your mistress. Please show me where I shall find Mrs. Winterbourne; that is enough."

Now the girl looked frightened; for the two strangers were inside; and she glanced behind her to see whether her mistress were not coming to her relief. Moreover, this tall young lady had an imperious way with her.

"Which is her room?"

"T—that is her sitting-room," stammered the girl—indeed, they were all standing just outside the door of it.

"Thank you," she said, and she put her hand on the handle of the door. "Jane, wait for me." The next moment she was inside the room, and the door shut behind her.

A spasm of fear caught her and struck her motionless. Some one sat there—some one in a chair—idly looking into the fire—a newspaper flung aside. And what horror might not have to be encountered now? She had been warned; she had prepared herself; but still——

Then the next moment a great flood of pity and joy and gratitude filled her heart; for the face that was turned to her—that regarded her with a mild surprise—though it was emaciated and pallid, was not unlovable; and the eyes were large and strange and melancholy. This poor lady rose, and with a gentle curtesy regarded her visitor, and said—

"I beg your pardon ; I did not hear you come into the room."

What a strange voice—hollow and distant ; and it was clear that she was looking at this new-comer only with a vague half-pleased curiosity, not with any natural wonder at such an intrusion. Yolande could not speak. She forgot all that she had meant to say. Her heart seemed to be choking her.

"Mother," she managed to say at length, "you do not know, then, that I am your daughter?"

"My Yolande?" she said—and she retreated a step, as if in fear. "You are not my Yolande—you?"

She regarded her apparently with some strange kind of dread—as if she were an apparition. There was no wonder, or joy, or sudden impulse of affection.

"You—you cannot be my Yolande—my daughter?"

"But indeed I am, mother," said the girl, with the tears running down her face in spite of herself. "Ah, it is cruel that I should come to you as a stranger—that you should have no word of kindness for me ! But no matter. We shall soon make up for all these years. Mother, I have come to take you away. You must no longer be here, alone. You will come with me, will you not?"

The pale, emaciated, hollow-voiced woman came nearer now, and took Yolande's hand, and regarded her with a kind of vague pleased curiosity and kindness.

"And you are really my Yolande, then ? How tall you are ; and beautiful, too—like an angel. When I have thought of you, it was not like this. What beautiful, beautiful hair ; and so straight you have grown, and tall ! So they have sent you to me at last. But it is too late now—too late."

"No, no, mother ; it is not too late ! You will come away with me, will you not—now—at once?"

The other shook her head sadly ; and yet it was obvious that she was taking more and more interest in her daughter—regarding her from top to toe, admiring her dress even, and all the time holding her hand.

"Oh no, I cannot go away with you," she said. "It is not for you to be hampered with one like me. I am content. I am at peace here. I am quite happy here. You are young, rich, beautiful ; you will have a beautiful life ; everything

beautiful round you. It is so strange to look at you! And who sent you? The lawyers, I suppose. What do they want now? Why do they not let me alone?"

She let the girl's hand fall, and turned away dejectedly, and sank down into the easy-chair again, with a sigh. But Yolande was mistress of herself now. She went forward, put her hand upon her mother's shoulder, and said firmly—

"Mother, I will not allow you to remain here. It is not a fit place for you. I have come to take you away myself; the lawyers have not sent me; they want nothing. Dear mother, do make up your mind to come away with me—now!"

Her entreaty was urgent; for she could hear distinctly that there were some "high words" being bandied in the lobby; and she wished to get her mother away without any unseemly squabble.

"Do, mother! Everything is ready. You and I will go away together to Worthing; and the sea air and the country drives will soon make you well again. I have got everything prepared for you—pretty rooms fronting the sea; and a balcony where you can sit and read; and I have a pony-carriage to take you for drives through the lanes. Ah, now, to think it is your own daughter who is asking you! You cannot refuse! You cannot refuse!"

She had risen again, and taken Yolande's hand; but her look was hesitating, bewildered.

"They will be angry," said she, timidly; for now the dis-sension without was clearly audible.

"Who, then?" said Yolande, proudly. "You will leave them to me, mother; I am not afraid. Ah, if you saw how much prettier the rooms are at Worthing!—yes; and no longer you will have to sit alone by yourself in the evening. Come, mother!"

At this moment the door opened; and a short, stout, red-faced, black-haired woman made her appearance. It was clear that the altercation with Jane had not improved her temper.

"I beg your pardon, young lady," said she, with studied deference, "but I want to know what this means."

Yolande turned, with flashing eyes.

"Leave the room!"

For a second the woman was cowed by her manner ; but the next moment she had bridled up again.

“Leave the room, indeed ! Leave the room—in my own house ! Not until I’m paid. And what’s more, the poor dear lady isn’t going to be taken away against her will. She knows who her friends are. She knows who have looked after her and nursed her. She shan’t be forced away from the house against her will, I warrant you.”

“Leave the room this instant, or I will send for a policeman !” Yolande said ; and she had drawn herself up to her full height ; for her mother, poor creature, was timidly shrinking behind her.

“A policeman ! Hoity-toity !” said the other, with her little black eyes sparkling. “You’d better have no policeman in here. It’s not them that are robbing a poor woman that should call for a policeman. But you haven’t taken her with you yet ; and what’s more, she shan’t move an inch out of this house until every farthing that’s owing to us is paid—that she shan’t. We’re not going to be robbed, so long as there’s the law. Not till every farthing is paid, I warrant you !—so perhaps you’ll let the poor dear lady alone, and leave her in the care of them that she knows to be her friends. A policeman, indeed ! Not one step shall she budge until every farthing of her debt is paid !”

Now for the moment Yolande was completely disconcerted. It was a point she had not foreseen ; it was a point, therefore, on which she had asked no counsel. She had been assured by Mr. Lang that she had nothing to fear in taking away her mother from this house—that she was acting strictly within her legal rights. But how about this question of debt ? Could they really detain her ? Outwardly, however, she showed no symptom of this sudden doubt. She said to the woman with perfect calmness—

“Your impertinence will be of little use to you. My mother is going with me ; I am her guardian ; if you interfere with me, it will be at your own peril. If my mother owes you anything, it will be paid.”

“How am I to know that ? Here she is, and here she shall remain, until every farthing is paid. We are not going to be robbed in that way !”

“I tell you that whatever is owing to you will be paid,”

said Yolande. "You need not pretend that you have any fear of being robbed; you know you will be paid. And now, I wish you to tell me where my mother's things are. Which is her bedroom?"

"I'll show you whether you can ride the high horse over me!" said the woman, with her eyes glittering with anger. "I'll go and fetch my husband—that I will." And the next second she had left the room and the house too—running out into the night bare-headed.

"Now, mother," said Yolande, quickly, "now is our chance! Where are your things? Oh, you must not think of packing anything; we will send for what you want to-morrow. But do you really owe these people anything?"

"I don't know," said her mother, who seemed to have been terrified by this threat on the part of the woman.

"Well, then, where is your hat?—where is your shawl? Where is your room?"

Almost mechanically she opened the folding-doors that formed one side of the apartment, disclosing beyond a bedroom. Yolande preceded her, picked up the things she wanted, and helped her to put them on.

"Come, now, mother; we will get away before they come back. Oh, you need not be afraid. Everything is arranged for you. There is a cab waiting for us outside."

"Who is in it?" said the mother, drawing back with a gesture of fear.

"Why, no one at all!" said Yolande, cheerfully. "But my maid is just outside, in the passage. Come along, mother!"

"Where are we going?"

"To the hotel where I am staying, to be sure! Everything is arranged for you—we are to have supper together—you and I—all by ourselves. Will that please you, mother?"

"Wait for a moment, then."

She went back into the bedroom; and almost instantly reappeared—glancing at Yolande with a quick furtive look that the girl did not understand. She understood after.

"Come, then!"

She took her mother by the hand and led her as if she were a child. In the lobby they encountered Jane; and Jane was angry.

"Another minute, Miss, and I would have turned her out by the shoulders!" she said, savagely.

"Oh, it is all right," said Yolande, briskly. "Everything is quite right! Open the door, Jane—there's a good girl."

They had got out from the house, and were indeed crossing the pavement, when the landlady again made her appearance, coming hurriedly up in the company of a man who looked like (what he was) a butler out of employment, and who was obviously drunk. He began to hector and bully. He interposed himself between them and the cab.

"You aint going away like this! You aint going to rob poor people like this! You come back into the house until we settle this affair."

Now Yolande's only aim was to get clear of the man and to get her mother put into the cab; but he stood in front of her, whichever way she made the attempt; and at last he put his hand on her arm, to force her back to the house. It was an unfortunate thing for him that he did so. There was a sudden crash; the man reeled back, staggered, and then fell like a log on to the pavement; and Yolande, bewildered by the instantaneous nature of the whole occurrence, only knew that something like a black shadow had gone swiftly by. All this appeared to have happened in a moment; and in that same moment here was the policeman in plain clothes, whom she knew by sight.

"What a shame to strike the poor man!" said he to the landlady, who was on her knees, shrieking, by the side of her husband. "But he aint much hurt, mum. I'll help him indoors, mum. I'm a constable, I am; I wish I knew who done that; I'd have the law agin him."

As he uttered these words of consolation, he regarded the prostrate man with perfect equanimity; and a glance over his shoulder informed him that, in the confusion, Yolande and her mother and the maid had got into the cab and driven off. Then he proceeded to raise the stupefied ex-butler, who certainly had received a "facer;" but who presently came to himself as near as the fumes of rum would allow. Nay, he helped, or rather steadied, the man into the house; and assured the excited landlady that the law would find out who had committed this outrage; but he refused the offer of a glass

of something, on the plea that he was on duty. Then he took down the number of the house in his note-book and left.

As he walked along the street, he was suddenly accosted by the tall broad-shouldered young man who had disappeared into the narrow entry.

"Why weren't you up in time?" said the latter, angrily.

"Lor, sir, you was so quick!"

"Is that drunken idiot hurt?"

"Well, sir, he may 'ave a black eye in the morning—maybe a pair on 'em. But 'taint no matter. He'll think he run agin a lamp-post. He's as drunk as drunk."

"What was the row about?—I couldn't hear a word."

"Why, sir, they said as the lady owed them something."

"Oh, that was the dodge. However, it's all settled now; very well settled. Let me see, I suppose Lawrence and Lang pay you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you know, I don't think you did your best. You weren't sharp enough. When you saw that drunken brute seize hold of the young lady's arm, you should have been there—on the spot—on the instant——"

"Lor, sir, you was so quick!—and the man went over like a ninepin——"

"Well, the affair is satisfactory as it stands," said the younger and taller man; "and I am well satisfied, and so I suppose you don't mind my adding a sovereign to what Lawrence and Lang will give you."

"Thank ye, sir," said the man, touching his cap.

"Here you are, then. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Then the younger man walked on to the corner of the street; jumped into the hansom that was still awaiting him there; called through the trap-door to the driver "United University Club, corner of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall," and so was driven off.

That same night Yolande wrote the following letter to her father:—

"MY DEAR PAPA—I wish that I might write this letter in French, for my heart is so full; but I know you would not like

it, so I will do my best in English. It is all over and settled ; my mother is with me—in this room where I am writing—reading a little, but not so agitated by the events of the day, or rather this evening, that one might expect. It is I who am agitated ; please forgive any errors. But, oh, it was the saddest thing ever seen in the world, for a mother to be standing opposite her own daughter, and not caring for her—not knowing her. We were two strangers. But my heart was glad. I had had the apprehension that I should have to overcome emotions ; that it might be only duty that would keep me by her side ; but no, no, when I saw her face, and her gentle eyes, I said to myself how easy would be the task of loving her as a daughter should. Dear papa, she is so ill ; and also she seems so far away and absorbed and sad. She is only a little interested in me—only a little. But yet I think she is pleased. I have shown her what wardrobe I have with me, and that pleased her a little ; but it is I who will have to be the guardian, and buy things for her. She was pleased with my dressing-bag ; and to-morrow I am going to buy her the most beautiful one I can get in London. Mr. Lang asked me to burn the three blank cheques you gave me ; and I did that ; and I am to have money from him ; but after the dressing-bag, I hope there will not be much expense ; for we shall be living quietly at Worthing, and I know that when you gave Mrs. Graham the expensive piece of broderie at Cairo you will not grudge me that I give my mother a beautiful dressing-bag.

“It has all happened just as Mr. Melville planned ; how he could have foreseen so much I cannot tell ; perhaps it is that I followed to his instructions as nearly as I could. The people were insolent somewhat ; but to me, not to my mother ; so that is right. But at the end, when we were coming away, the man seized me, and then I was frightened—he wished me to go back into the house—and then, I know not how, he was struck and fell,—perhaps by the policeman it was, but I did not stay to look ; I hurried my mother into the cab, and we are here safe and sound. Poor Jane is so angry. She demands to go back to-morrow, to recover some things of my mother’s, and also that she wants to ‘have it out’ with the woman because of the way she spoke to me ; but this I will not allow ;

I shall write to Messrs. Lawrence and Lang to-night to send some one ; also to pay whatever is owing.

“She has just come over and stroked my hair, and gone back to her chair again ; I think she is a little more affectionate to me now ; and oh ! I am so anxious to get away to the sea air, that it may wake her out of this lethargy. I know it will ; I am sure of it. We have got such cheerful rooms. The address, dear papa, is Arbutus Villa, — Terrace, Worthing ; please give it to Duncan, and tell him to send me each week a brace of grouse, a brace of black game, one or two hares, and any odd ptarmigan or snipe you may get ; then I will know that they are good. To-night we had supper together ; alas ! she ate scarcely anything. I asked if she would have a little wine—no ; she seemed to have a horror of it—even to be frightened. She came round the table, and took me by the hand, and begged of me to be always with her. I said was not that what I had come for ? She said, with such a strange voice, ‘I need help—I need help ;’ and I answered that now everything was to be reversed, and that I was to be the mother to her, and to take charge of her. Then she cried a little ; but I think she was pleased with me ; and when I said that I wanted to write a letter, after we had finished, she said she would read until I had written the letter, and then that she wished to hear where I had been, and how I had lived in the Highlands. Perhaps in time I will persuade her to be affectionate to me ; on my part, it will not be difficult that I should soon love her ; for she is gentle, and to regard her fills one’s heart with pity. I had great terror that it might not be so.

“To-morrow, if it is possible, I think we will get away to Worthing ; I am anxious to begin my guardianship. Perhaps by a middle-day train—if I have to buy some things for my mother. Or why not there, where we shall have plenty of time ? I wish to see her away from the town—in clear brisk air ; then we shall have the long, quiet, beautiful days to become acquainted with each other. It is so strange, is it not, a mother and daughter becoming acquainted with each other ? But, since I am her guardian, I must not let her sit up too late ; and so good-night, dear, dear papa, from your affectionate daughter,

YOLANDE.”

That was naturally the end of the letter ; and yet she held it open before her for some time, in hesitation. And then she took her pen and added : " I cannot tell you how glad it would make me if you had time to write a long letter to me about Allt-nam-ba, and all the people there ; for one cannot help looking back to the place where one has been happy."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A BEGINNING.

DESPITE all her hurrying, however, Yolande did not manage to get away from London on the day following ; it was not until early the next morning that she and her mother and the maid found themselves finally in the train, and the great city left behind for good. The weather was brilliant and shining around them ; and the autumn-tinted woods were glorious in colour. To these, or any other passing object, Yolande, in her capacity of guardian, drew cheerful attention, treating the journey, indeed, as a very ordinary every-day affair ; but the sad-eyed mother seemed hardly capable of regarding anything but her daughter—and that sometimes with a little bit of stealthy crying.

" Ah !" she said, in those strangely hollow tones, " it is kind of you to come and let me see you for a little while."

" A little while ? What little while, then ?" said Yolande, with a stare.

" Until I go back."

" Until you go back where, mother ?"

" Anywhere—away from you," said the mother, regarding the girl with an affectionate and yet wistful look. " It was in a dream that I came away from the house with you. You seemed calling me in a dream. But now I am beginning to wake. At the station there were two ladies ; I saw them looking at us ; and I knew what they were thinking. They were wondering to see a beautiful young life like yours linked to a life like mine ; and they were right. I could see it in their eyes."

" They would have been better employed in minding their own business !" said Yolande, angrily.

"No ; they were right," said her mother, calmly ; and then she added with a curious sort of smile : " But I am going to be with you for a little while. I am not going away yet. I want to learn all about you, and understand you ; then I shall know what to think when I hear of you afterwards. You will have a happy life ; I shall hear of you perhaps and be proud and glad ; I shall think of you always as young and happy and beautiful ; and when you go back to your friends——"

" Dear mother," said Yolande, " I wish you would not talk nonsense. When I go back to my friends ! I am not going back to any friends until you go back with me ; do you understand that ?"

" I ?" said she ; and for a second there was a look of fright on her face. Then she shook her head sadly. " No, no. My life is wrecked and done for ; yours is all before you—without a cloud, without a shadow. As for me, I am content. I will stay with you a little while, and get to know you ; then I will go away—how could I live if I knew that I was the shadow on your life ?"

" Well, yes, mother, you have got a good deal to learn about me," said Yolande, serenely. " It is very clear that you don't know what a temper I have, or you would not be so anxious to provoke me to anger. But please remember that it isn't what you want, or what you intend to do—it is what I may be disposed to allow you to do. I have been spoiled all my life ; that is one thing you will have to learn about me. I always have my own way. You will find that out very soon ; and then you will give over making foolish plans, or thinking that it is for you to decide. Do you think I have stolen you away, and carried you into slavery, to let you do as you please ? Not at all ; it is far from that. As soon as we get to Worthing I am going to get you a prettier bonnet than that—I know the shop perfectly—I saw it the other day. But do you think I will permit you to choose the colour ? No ; not at all ! Not at all. And as for your going away, or going back, or going anywhere—oh, we will see about that, I assure you !"

For the time being, at all events, the mother did not protest. She seemed more and more fascinated by the society of her daughter ; and appeared quite absorbed in regarding the bright young fresh face, and in listening with a strange curiosity for

the slight traces of a foreign accent that remained in Yolande's talking. As for the girl herself, she bore herself in the most matter-of-fact way. She would have no sentiment interfere. And always it was assumed that her mother was merely an invalid whom the sea air would restore to health ; not a word was said as to the cause of her present condition.

Worthing looked bright and cheerful on this breezy forenoon. The wind-swept yellow-gray sea was struck a gleaming silver here or there with floods of sunlight ; the morning promenaders had not yet gone into lunch ; a band was playing at the end of the pier. When they got to the rooms, they found that every preparation had been made to receive them ; and in the bay-window they discovered a large telescope which the little old lady said she had borrowed from a neighbour whose rooms were unlet. Yolande managed everything—Jane being a helpless kind of creature ; and the mother submitted, occasionally with a touch of amusement appearing in her manner. But usually she was rather sad, and her eyes had an absent look in them.

“Now let me see,” said Yolande, briskly, as they sat at lunch (Jane waiting on them). “There is really so much to be done, that I don't know where we should begin. Oh yes, I do. First we will walk along to the shops and buy your bonnet. Then to a chemist's for some scent for your dressing-bag. Then we must get glass dishes for flowers for the table—one round one for the middle, and two semicircles. Then when we come back the pony-carriage must be waiting for us ; and we will give you a few minutes to put on the bonnet, dear mother ; and then we will go away for a drive into the country. Perhaps we shall get some wild flowers ; if not, then we will buy some when we come back——”

“Why should you give yourself so much trouble, Yolande?” her mother said.

“Trouble? It is no trouble. It is an amusement—an occupation. Without an occupation how can one live?”

“Ah, you are so full of life—so full of life,” the mother said, regarding her wistfully.

“Oh, I assure you,” said Yolande, blithely, “that not many know what can be made of wild flowers in a room—if you have plenty of them. Not all mixed ; but here one mass of

colour ; and there—another. Imagine, now, that we were thirty-three miles from Inverness ; how could one get flowers except by going up the hillside and collecting them ? That was an occupation that had a little trouble, to be sure !—it was harder work than going to buy a bonnet ! But sometimes we were not quite dependent on the wild flowers ; there was a dear good woman, living a few miles away—ah, she was a good friend to me—who used to send me from her garden far more than was right. And every time that I passed—another handful of flowers ; more than that, perhaps some fresh vegetables all nicely packed up ; perhaps a little basket of new-laid eggs ; perhaps a pair of ducklings—oh, such kindness as was quite ridiculous from a stranger. And then when I come away, she goes to the lodge, and takes one of the girls with her, to see that all is right ; and no question of trouble or inconvenience ; you would think it was you who were making the obligation and giving kindness, not taking it. I must write to her when I have time. But I hope soon to hear how they are all going on up there in the Highlands.”

“Dear Yolande,” said the mother, “why should you occupy yourself about me ? Do your writing ; I am content to sit in the same room. Indeed, I would rather listen to you talking about the Highlands than go out to get the bonnet or anything else.”

“Why do I occupy myself about you ?” said Yolande. “Because I have brought you here to make you well, that is why. And you must be as much as possible out of doors—especially on such a day as this, when the air is from the sea. Ah, we shall soon make you forget the London dinginess and the smoke. And you would rather not go for a drive, perhaps, when it is I who am going to drive you ?”

Indeed, she took the mastership into her own hand ; and perhaps that was a fortunate necessity, for it prevented her thinking over certain things that had happened to herself. Wise, grave-eyed, thoughtful, and prudent, there was now little left in her manner of speech of the petulant and light-hearted Yolande of other days ; and yet she was pleased to see that her mother was taking more and more interest in her, and perhaps sometimes—though she strove to forget the past altogether and only to keep herself busily occupied with the

present—there was some vague and subtle sense of self-approval. Or was it self-approval? Was it not rather some dim kind of belief that, if he who had appealed to her, if he who had said that he had faith in her, could now see her, he would say that she was doing well? But she tried to put these remembrances away.

An odd thing happened when they were out. They had gone to the shop where Yolande had seen the bonnets; and she was so satisfied with the one that she chose that she made her mother put it on then and there, and asked the milliner to send the other home. Then they went outside again; and not far off was a chemist's shop.

"Now," said Yolande, "we will go and choose two scents for the bottles in the dressing-bag. One shall be white rose, and the other? What other?"

"Whichever you like best, Yolande," said her mother, submissively; her daughter had become so completely her guide and guardian.

"But it is for your dressing-bag, mother, not mine," said Yolande. "You must choose. You must come into the shop and choose."

"Very well, then."

They walked to the shop, and Yolande glanced for a minute at the window and then went inside. But the moment they had got within the door—perhaps it was the odour of the place that had recalled her to herself—the mother shrank back with a strange look of fear on her face.

"Yolande," she said, in a low hurried voice, "I will wait for you outside."

"But which is to be the other scent, mother?"

"I will wait for you outside," said she, with her hand touching her daughter's arm. "I will wait for you outside."

Then Yolande seemed to comprehend what that dazed look of fear meant; and she was so startled that, even after her mother had left, she could scarce summon back enough self-possession to tell the shopman what she wanted. Thereafter she never asked her mother to go near a chemist's shop.

That same afternoon they went for a drive along some of the inland country lanes; and as they soon found that the stolid, fat, and placid pony could safely be left under the

charge of Jane, they got out whenever they had a mind, to look at an old church or to explore banks and hedgerows in search of wild flowers. Now this idle strolling, with occasional scrambling across ditches, was light enough work for one who was accustomed to climb the hills of Allt-nam-ba; but no doubt it was fatiguing enough to this poor woman, who, nevertheless, did her very best to prove herself a cheerful companion. But it was on this fatigue that Yolande reckoned. That was why she wanted her mother to be out all day in the sea air and the country air. What she was aiming at was a certainty of sleep for this invalid of whom she was in charge. And so she cheered her on to further exertion, and pretended an eagerness in this search for wild flowers which was not very real (for ever, in the midst of it, some stray plant here or there would remind her of a herbarium far away and of other days and other scenes), until at last she thought they had both done their duty; and so they got into the little carriage again and drove back to Worthing.

That evening at dinner she amused her mother with a long and minute account of the voyage to Egypt, and of the friends who had gone with them, and of the life on board the dahabeeah. The mother seemed peculiarly interested about Mr. Leslie, and asked many questions about him; and Yolande told her frankly how pleasant and agreeable a young fellow he was, and how well he and his sister seemed to understand each other, and so forth. She betrayed no embarrassment in expressing her liking for him; although, in truth, she spoke in pretty much the same terms of Colonel Graham.

"Mr. Leslie was not married, then?"

"Oh no."

"It was rather a dangerous situation for two young people," the mother said, with a gentle smile. "It is a wonder you are not wearing a ring now."

"What ring?" Yolande said, with a quick flush of colour.

"An engagement-ring."

In fact, the girl was not wearing her engagement-ring. On coming to London she had taken it off and put it away; other duties claimed her now—that was what she said to herself. And now she was content that her mother should remain in ignorance of that portion of her past story.

"I have other things to attend to," she said, briefly; and the subject was not continued.

That day passed very successfully. The mother had shown not the slightest symptom of any craving for either stimulant or narcotic; nor any growing depression in consequence of being deprived of these—though Jack Melville had warned Yolande that both were probable. No; the languor from which she suffered appeared to be merely the languor of ill-health; and, so far from becoming more depressed, she had become rather more cheerful—especially when they were wandering along the lanes in search of wild flowers. Moreover, when she went to bed (she and Yolande occupied a large double-bedded room) she very speedily fell into a sound quiet sleep. Yolande lay awake, watching her; but everything seemed right; and so by and by the girl's mind began to wander away to distant scenes and to pictures that she had been trying to banish from her eyes.

And if sometimes in this hushed room she cried silently to herself, and hid her face in the pillow so that no sob should awaken the sleeping mother? Well, perhaps that was only a natural reaction. The strain of all that forced cheerfulness had been terrible. Once or twice during the evening she had had to speak of the Highlands; and the effort on such occasions to shut out certain recollections and vain regrets and self-abasements was of itself a hard thing. And now that the strain was over, her imagination ran riot; all the old life up there, with its wonder and delight and its unknown pitfalls, came back to her; and all through it she seemed to hear a sad refrain—a couple of lines from one of Mrs. Bell's ballads—that she could not get out of her head.

*"Quoth he, 'My bonnie ledly, were ye sweet Jeanie Graham!'
'Indeed, guid Sir, but ye've guessed my very name.'"*

They could not apply to her; but somehow there was sorrow in them; and a meeting after many years; and the tragedy of two changed lives. How could they apply to her? If there was any one of whom she was thinking it ought to have been he to whom she had plighted her troth. She had put aside her engagement-ring for a season; but she was not thereby absolved from her promise. And yet it was not of him that she was thinking—it was of some one she saw only vaguely—

but gray-haired and after many years—coming back to a wrecked existence—and her heart, that had a great yearning and pity and love in it, knew that it could not help—and what was there but a woman's tears and a lifelong regret? That was a sad night. It was not the mother, it was the daughter, who passed the long sleepless hours in suffering. But with the morning Yolande had pulled herself together again. She was only a little pale—that was all. She was as cheerful, as brave, as high-spirited as ever. When did the band play?—they would walk out on the pier. But even Jane could see that this was not the Yolande who had lived at Allt-nam-ba—with a kind of sunlight always on her face; and she wondered.

Not that day but the next came the anxiously expected news from the Highlands.

“MY DARLING YOLANDE—Your letter has given me inexpressible relief. I was so loth to see you go. Above all, it seemed so cruel that you should go alone, and I remain here. But probably Mr. Melville was right; perhaps it may all turn out for the best; but it will be a long time before any one can say so; and as I think of you in the meantime, it is with no great sense of satisfaction that I am conscious that I can do nothing to help you. But I rejoice that so far you have had no serious trouble; perhaps the worst is over; if that *were* so, then there might be a recompense to you for what you must be undergoing. It would be strange, indeed, if this should succeed after so many failures. It would make a great difference to all our lives; sometimes I begin to think it possible, and then recollections of the past prove too strong. Let me know your opinion. Tell me everything. Even after all these years, sometimes I begin to hope, and to think of our having a home and a household after all.

“There is but little news to send you. At the moment I am quite alone. Mr. Shortlands has changed all his plans, and has gone south for a few days, finding that he can come back and remain with me until the 15th of October. Then you must tell me what you would have me do. Perhaps you will know better by that time. If you think the experiment hopeless, I trust you will have the honesty to say so; then I

will take you for a run abroad somewhere, after your long waiting and nursing.

“The Master is in Inverness, I hear ; probably it is business that detains him ; otherwise I should have been glad of his company on the hill, now that Shortlands is away. But the shooting has lost all interest for me ; when I come back in the evening there is no one standing at the door, and no one to sit at the head of the dinner-table. I shall be glad when the 15th of October comes ; and then, if there is no prospect of your present undertaking proving successful, you and I will preen our feathers for the South. If they are going to bury you alive in these wilds subsequently, you and I must have at least one last swallow-flight. Not the Riviera this time ; the Riviera is getting to be a combination of Bond Street and Piccadilly. Athens—what do you say ? I remember the Grahams talking vaguely about their perhaps trying to spend a winter in Algiers : and pleasanter travelling companions you could not find anywhere ; but even if we have to go alone, we shall not grumble much ?

“This reminds me that one part of your letter made me very angry—I mean about the expense of the dressing-bag, and your proposed economy at Worthing. I suppose it was those people at the Château that put those ideas into your head ; but I wish you to understand that there is nothing so stupid as unnecessary economy for economy’s sake ; and that when I wish you to begin cheese-paring I will tell you so. Extravagance is silly—and ill-bred, too ; but there is some such thing as knowing what one can fairly spend in proportion to one’s income ; and when I wish you to be more moderate in your expenditure I will tell you. And, indeed, it is not at such a time that you should think of expense at all. If this experiment is likely to end as we wish—then we shall not be considering a few pounds or so.

“I think you will be pleased to hear that Mrs. Bell does not manage one whit better than you—how could she, when everything was perfect ? But the situation is awkward. I imagined she was only coming here for a day or two—to set things going, as it were, under a new *régime* ; but the good woman shows no signs of departure ; and, indeed, she manages everything with such tact and good sense, and with such an

honest frank recognition of the facts of the case, that I am really afraid to hurt her and offend her by suggesting that she should not waste so much of her time up here. It was all very well with Mr. Melville—he was her hero, the master of the house, the representative of the family that she looked up to; but it is different with me; and yet there is a kind of self-respect in the way in which she strictly keeps to her ‘station,’ that one does not like to interfere. I have thought of pointing out to her that my last housekeeper was a person called Yolande Winterbourne, and that she was in no wise so respectful in her manner; but then I thought it better to let the good woman have her own way; and with all her respectfulness there is, as you know, a frank and honest friendliness which tells you that she quite understands her own value in the world. She has, however, been so communicative as to unfold to me her great project of the buying back of Monaglen; and I must say it seems very ill-advised of Mr. Melville, just when this project is about to be accomplished, to disappear and leave not even his address behind. All that Mrs. Bell knows is that, on the morning you left, he announced his intention of crossing over the hills to Kingussie, to catch the night-train going south; and Duncan says he saw him going up by the Corrie-an-Eich. You know what an undertaking that is, and the stories they tell about people having been lost in these solitudes; but, as Duncan says, there was not any one in the country who could cross the hills with less chance of coming to harm than Mr. Melville. Still, he might have left the good woman his address; and she, it seems, did not consider it her ‘place’ to ask.”

At this point Yolande stopped—her brain bewildered, her heart beating wildly. If he had crossed over the hills to catch the night-train to the south—why, that was the train in which she also was travelling from Inverness to London! Had he been in that same train, then—separated from her by a few carriages only—during the long darkness in which she seemed to be leaving behind her youth, and hope, and almost the common desire of life? And why? He had spoken to no one of his going away. Mrs. Bell had guessed that he might be going, from his preparations of the previous evening; but

to leave on that very morning—to catch the very train in which she was seated—perhaps to come all the way to London with her; here was food for speculation and wonder! Of course, it never occurred to her that he might have come to any harm in crossing the hills; she did not even think of that. He was as familiar with these corries and slopes and streams as with the door-step of the house at Gress. No; he had waited for the train to come along; perhaps she did not even look out from the window when they reached the station; he would get into one of the carriages; and all through the long afternoon and evening, and on and through the blackness of the night, and in the gray of the morning, he was there. And perhaps at Euston Square, too? He might easily escape her notice in the crowd, if he wished to do so. Would he disappear into the wilderness of London? But he knew the name of the hotel she was going to—that had all been arranged between them; might he not by accident have passed along Albemarle Street on one or other of those days? Ah, if she had chanced to see him!—would not London have seemed less lonely—would she not have consoled herself with the fancy that somewhere or other there was one watching over her and guarding her? A dream—a dream. If he were indeed there, he had avoided meeting her. He had gone away. He had disappeared—into the unknown; and perhaps the next she should hear of him might be after many years, as of a gray-haired man going back to the place that once knew him, with perhaps some vague question on his lips: “*My bonny leddy, were ye sweet Jeanie Graham?*”—though to whom he might address that question she scarcely dared to ask or think. She only looked over the remainder of the letter; her hurried fancies were wandering far away.

“So you see I have no news; although in my solitude this gossip seems to unite you with me for a time. The only extraordinary thing that I have seen or met with since you left me ran across the other night on coming home from the shooting. We had been to the far tops after ptarmigan and white hares, and got belated. Long before we reached home complete darkness overtook us; a darkness so complete that, although we walked Indian file, Duncan leading, I could not

see Shortlands, who was just in front of me ; I had to follow him by sound, sliding down among loose stones or jumping into peat-hags in a very happy-go-lucky fashion. Crossing the Allt Crôm by the little swinging bridge you know of was also a pleasant performance ; for there had been rain, and the waters were much swollen, and made a terrible noise in the dark. However, it was when we were over the bridge and making for the lodge that I noticed the phenomenon I am going to tell you about. I was trying to make out John Shortlands' legs in front of me when I saw on the ground two or three small points of white fire. I thought it strange for glow-worms to be so high above the level of the sea ; and I called the others back to examine these things. But now I found, as they were all standing in the dark, talking, that wherever you lifted your foot from the wet black peat, immediately afterwards a large number of these pale points of clear fire appeared, burning for about a minute and then gradually disappearing. Some were larger and clearer than others—just as you remember, on a phosphorescent night at sea, there are individual big stars separate from the general rush of white as the steamer goes on. We tried to lift some of the points of light, but could not manage it ; so I take it they were not glow-worms or any other living creatures, but an emanation of gas from the peaty soil ; only that, unlike the will-o'-the-wisp, they were quite stationary and burned with a clear white, or blue-white flame—the size of the most of them not bigger than the head of a common pin, and sometimes about fifteen or twenty of them appearing where one foot had been pressed into the soft soil. Had Mr. Melville been at Gress I should have asked him about it ; no doubt he has noticed this thing in his rambles ; but he has been away, as I say, and nobody about here has any explanation to offer. The shepherds say that the appearance of this phosphorescence, or electricity, or illuminated gas, or whatever it is, foretells a change in the weather ; but I have never yet met with anything in heaven or earth of which the shepherds did not say the same thing. But as you, my dear Yolande, have not seen this phenomenon, and know absolutely nothing about it, you will be in a position to furnish me with a perfectly consistent scientific theory about it, which I desire to have from you at your convenience.

“A hamper of game goes to you to-day—also a bunch of white heather from your affectionate father,
“R. G. WINTERBOURNE.”

She dwelt over the picture here presented of his solitary life in the north; and she knew that now no longer were there happy dinner-parties in the evening, and pleasant friends talking together; and no longer was there any need for Duncan—outside in the twilight—to play *Melville's Welcome Home*.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AWAKING.

ANOTHER two days passed, Yolande doing her best to make the time go by briskly and pleasantly. They walked on the promenade or the pier; they drove away inland, through quaint little villages and quiet lanes; when the weather was wet they stayed indoors, and she read to her mother; or they rigged up the big telescope in the bay-window, to follow the slow progress of the distant ships. And the strange thing was that, as Yolande gradually perceived, her mother's intellect seemed to grow clearer and clearer while her spirits grew more depressed.

“I have been in a dream—I have been in a dream,” she used to say. “I will try not to go back. Yolande, you must help me. You must give me your hand.”

“You have been ill, mother; the sea air will make you strong again,” the girl said, making no reference to other matters.

However, that studied silence did not last. On the evening of the fifth day of their stay at Worthing, Yolande observed that her mother seemed still more depressed and almost suffering; and she did all she could to distract her attention and amuse her. At last the poor woman said, looking at her daughter in a curious kind of a way—

“Yolande, did you notice, when I came away from the house with you, that I went back for a moment into my room?”

“Yes, I remember you did?”

“I will tell you now why I went back.”

She put her hand in her pocket and drew out a small blue bottle, which she put on the table.

"It was for that," she said, calmly.

A flush of colour overspread the hitherto pale features of the girl; it was she who was ashamed and embarrassed; and she said quickly—

"Yes, I understand, mother—I know what it is—but now you will put it away—you do not want it any longer——"

"I am afraid," the mother said, in a low voice. "Sometimes I have tried, until it seemed as if I was dying; and that has brought me to life again. Oh, I hope I shall never touch it again—I want to be with you, walking by your side among the other people—and like them—like every one else——"

"And so you shall, mother," Yolande said; and she rose and got hold of the bottle. "I am going to throw this away."

"No, no, Yolande, give it to me," she said, but without any excitement. "It is no use throwing it away. That would make me think of it. I would get more. I could not rest until I had gone to a chemist's and got more—perhaps some time when you were not looking. But when it is there, I feel safe. I can push it away from me."

"Very well, then," said Yolande, and she went to the fireplace, and placed the bottle conspicuously on the mantel-shelf. Then she went back to her mother. "It shall remain there, mother—as something you have no further need of. That is done with now. It was a great temptation when you were living in lodgings in a town, not in good air; and you were very weak and ill; but soon you will be strong enough to get over your fits of faintness or depression without *that*." She put her hand on her mother's shoulder. "Is it for my sake that you have put it away?"

In answer she took her daughter's hand in both hers, and covered it with kisses.

"Yes, yes, yes! I have put it away, Yolande, for your sake. I have put it away for ever now. But you have a little excuse for me? You do not think so hardly of me as the others? I have been near dying—and alone. I did not know I had such a beautiful daughter—coming to take care of me, too! And I don't want you to go away now—not for a while at least. Stay with me for a little time—until—until I have got to be

just like the people we meet out walking—just like every one else—and then I shall have no fear of being alone—I shall never, never touch *that*.”

She glanced at the bottle on the mantel-shelf with a sort of horror. She held her daughter's hand tight. And Yolande kept by her until, not thinking it was prudent to make too much of this little incident, she begged her mother to come and get her things on for another short stroll before tea.

Towards the evening, however, it was clear that this poor woman was suffering more and more, although she endeavoured to put a brave face on it, and only desired that Yolande should be in the room with her. At dinner, she took next to nothing; and Yolande, on her own responsibility, begged to be allowed to send for some wine for her. But no. She seemed to think that there was something to be got through, and she would go through with it. Sometimes she went to the window and looked out—listening to the sound of the sea in the darkness. Then she would come back and sit down by the fire, and ask Yolande to read to her—this, that, or the other thing. But what she most liked to have read and re-read to her was “A Dream of Fair Women;” and she liked to have Yolande standing by the fireplace, so that she could regard her. And sometimes the tears would gather in her eyes, when the girl came to the lines about Jephtha's daughter:

“——emptied of all joy,

Leaving the dance and song.

“Leaving the olive-gardens far below,

Leaving the promise of my bridal bower,

The valleys of grape-loaded vines that glow

Beneath the battled tower.

“The light white cloud swam over us. Anon

We heard the lion roaring from his den;

We saw the large white stars rise one by one,

Or, from the darkened glen,

“Saw God divide the night with flying flame,

And thunder on the everlasting hills.

I heard Him, for He spake, and grief became

A solemn scorn of ills.”

“It was not fair—it was not fair,” she murmured.

“What, mother?”

"To send you here."

"Where ought I to be, then," she asked, proudly, "except by your side?"

"You? Your young life should not be sacrificed to mine. Why did they ask you? I should thank God, Yolande, if you were to go away this evening—now—if you were to go away, and be happy, with your youth, and beauty, and kind friends—that is the life fit for you——"

"But I am not going, mother."

"Ah, you don't know—you don't know," the other said, with a kind of despair coming over her. "I am ill, Yolande. I am wretched and miserable——"

"The more reason I should stay, surely!"

"I wish you would go away and leave me. I can get back to London. What I have been thinking of is beyond me. I am too ill. But you—you—I shall always think of you as moving through the world like a princess—in sunlight——"

"Dear mother," said Yolande, firmly, "I think we said we were going to have no more nonsense. I am not going to leave you. And what you were looking forward to is quite impossible. If you are ill and suffering now, I am sorry—I would gladly bear it for your sake. I have had little trouble in the world; I would take your share. But going away from you I am not. So you must take courage, and hope; and some day—ah, some day soon you will be glad."

"But if I am restless to-night," said she, glancing at her daughter uneasily, "and walking up and down, it will disturb you."

"What does it matter?" said Yolande, cheerfully.

"You might get another room?"

"I am not going into any other room—do you think I will forsake my patient?"

"Will you leave the light burning, then?"

"If you wish it—yes; but not high, for you must sleep."

But when they were retiring to rest the mother begged that the little blue bottle should be placed on the bedroom chimney-piece; and the girl hesitated.

"Why, mother, why? You surely would not touch it!"

"Oh, I hope not! I hope not! But I shall know it is near—if I am like to die!"

"You must not fear that, mother. I will put the bottle on the chimney-piece, if you like ; but you need not even think of it. That is more likely to cause your death than anything else. And you would not break your promise to me ?"

She pressed her daughter's hand—that was all.

Yolande did not go quickly to sleep ; for she knew that her mother was suffering—the laboured sighs from time to time told her as much. She lay and listened to the wash of the sea along the shingle, and to the tramp of the last wayfarers along the pavement. She heard the people of the house go upstairs to bed. And then, by and by, the stillness of the room, and the effects of the fresh air, and the natural healthiness of youth, combined to make her drowsy, and, rather against her inclination, her eyes slowly closed.

She was woke by a moan—as of a soul in mortal agony. But even in her alarm she did not start up ; she took time to recover her senses. And if the poor mother were really in such suffering, would it not be better for her to lie as if she were asleep ? No appeal could be made to her for any relaxation of the promise that had been given her.

Then she became aware of a stealthy noise ; and a strange terror took possession of her. She opened her eyes ever so slightly—glimmering through the lashes only—and there she saw that her worst fears were being realised. Her mother had got out of bed and stolen across the room to the sideboard in the parlour, returning with a glass. Yolande, all trembling, lay and watched. She was not going to interfere—it was not part of her plan ; and you may be sure she had contemplated this possibility before now. And very soon it appeared why the poor woman had taken the trouble to go for a glass ; it was to measure out the smallest quantity that she thought would alleviate her anguish. She poured a certain quantity of the black-looking fluid into the glass ; then she regarded it, as if with hesitation ; then she deliberately poured back one drop, two drops, three drops ; and drank the rest at a gulp. Then, in the same stealthy fashion, she took the glass to the parlour and left it there ; and crept silently back again and into bed.

Yolande rose. Her face was pale ; her lips firm. She did not look at her mother ; but, just as if she were assuming

her to be asleep, she quietly went out of the room and presently returned with a glass in her hand. She went to the chimney-piece. Very well she knew that her mother's eyes were fixed on her, and intently watching her; and, as she poured some of that dark fluid into the glass, no doubt she guessed the poor woman was imagining that this was an experiment to see what had been taken out of the bottle. But that was not quite Yolande's purpose. When she had poured out, as nearly as she could calculate, the same quantity that her mother had taken, she turned her face to the light, and deliberately drank the contents of the glass. It was done in a second; there was a sweet, mawkish, pungent taste in the mouth, and a shiver of disgust as she swallowed the thing; then she calmly replaced the bottle on the chimney-piece.

But the mother had sprung from her bed with a wild shriek, and caught the girl by both hands.

"Yolande, Yolande, what have you done?"

"What is right for you, mother, is right for me," she said, in clear and settled tones. "It is how I mean to do always!"

The frantic grief of this poor creature was pitiable to witness. She flung her arms round her daughter, and drew her to her, and wept aloud, and called down vengeance upon herself from Heaven. And then, in a passion of remorse, she flew at the bottle that was standing there, and would have hurled it into the fireplace, had not Yolande (whose head was beginning to swim already) interposed, calmly and firmly. She took the bottle from her mother's hand, and replaced it.

"No; it must remain there, mother. It must stand there until you and I can bear to know that it is there, and not to wish for it."

Even in the midst of her wild distress and remorse there was one phrase in this speech that had the effect of silencing the mother altogether. She drew back, aghast; her face white; her eyes staring with horror.

"You and I?" she repeated. "You and I? You—to become like—like——"

"Yes," said Yolande. "What is right for you is right for me; that is what I mean to do—*always*. Now, dear mother," she added, in a more languid way, "I will lie down—I am giddy——"

She sat down on the edge of the bed, putting her hand to her forehead, and rested so awhile ; then insensibly after a time she drooped down on to the pillow—although the frightened and frantic mother tried to get an arm round her waist ; and very soon the girl had relapsed into perfect insensibility.

And then a cry rang through the house like the cry of the Egyptian mothers over the death of their first-born. The poison seemed to act in directly opposite ways in the brains of these two women—the one it plunged into a profound stupor ; the other it drove into frenzy. She threw herself on the senseless form, and wound her arms round the girl, and shrieked aloud that she had murdered her child—her beautiful daughter—she was dying—dead—and no one to save her—murdered by her own mother ! The little household was roused at once. Jane came rushing in, terrified. The landlady was the first to recover her wits, and instantly she sent a housemaid for a doctor. Jane, being a strong-armed woman, dragged the hysterical mother back from the bed, and bathed her young mistress' forehead with eau-de-cologne—it was all the poor kind creature could think of. Then they tried to calm the mother somewhat ; for she was begging them to give her a knife, that she might kill herself and die with her child.

The doctor's arrival quieted matters somewhat ; and he had scarcely been a minute in the room when his eyes fell on the small blue bottle on the mantelpiece. That he instantly got hold of ; the label told him what were the contents ; and when he went back to the bedside of the girl—who was lying insensible, in a heavy-breathing sleep, her chest labouring as if against some weight—he had to exercise some control over the mother to get her to show him precisely the quantity of the fluid that had been taken. The poor woman seemed beside herself. She dropped on her knees before him in a passion of tears, and clasped her hands.

“ Save her—save her !—save my child to me !—if you can give her back to me I will die a hundred times before harm shall come to her—my beautiful child, that came to me like an angel, with kindness, and open hands—and this is what I have done ! ”

“ Hush, hush,” said the doctor, and he took her by the hand, and gently raised her. “ Now you must be quiet. I

am not going to wake your daughter. If that is what she took, she will sleep it off; she is young, and I should say healthy. I am going to let nature work the cure; though I fear the young lady will have a bad headache in the morning. It is a most mischievous thing to have such drugs in the house. You are her maid, I understand?" he said, turning to Jane.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! Well, I think for to-night you had better occupy that other bed there; and the young lady's mother can have a bed elsewhere. I don't think you need fear anything—except a headache in the morning. Let her sleep as long as she may. In the morning let her go for a drive in the fresh air, if she is too languid to walk."

But the mother cried so bitterly on hearing of this arrangement that they had to consent to her retaining her place in the room, while Jane said she could make herself comfortable enough in an arm-chair. As for the poor mother, she did not go back to her own bed at all; she sat at the side of Yolande's bed—at the foot of it, lest the sound of her sobbing should disturb the sleeper; and sometimes she put her hand ever so lightly on the bed-clothes, with a kind of pat, as it were, while the tears were running down her face.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"O' BYGANE DAYS AND ME."

THE Master of Lynn was walking along Church Street, Inverness, leisurely smoking his morning cigar, when a small boy from the hotel overtook him, and handed him a letter. He glanced at the handwriting, and saw it was from his sister; so he put it in his pocket without opening it. Then he went on and into Mr. Macleay's shop.

This was a favourite lounge of his. For not only was it a valuable museum of natural history—all kinds of curiosities and rarities being sent thither to be preserved—but also, to any one with sufficient knowledge, it afforded a very fair report as to what was going on in the different forests. More than

that, it was possible for one to form a shrewd guess as to the character of some of the people then wandering about the Highlands,—the sort of sportsmen, for example, who sent to be stuffed such rare and remarkable birds as gannets, kittiwakes, and skarts, or who wished to have all the honours of a glass-case and a painted background conferred on a three-pound trout. It was not difficult (as he sat on the counter or strolled about) to imagine the simple joy with which these trophies had been secured and carefully packed and sent away for preservation ; while, on the other hand, some great stag's head—a magnificent and solitary prize—perhaps awoke a touch of envy. The good-natured proprietor of the establishment, busy with his own affairs, let this young man do pretty much what he liked in the place ; and so it was that the Master, having had a look at the latest specimens of the skill of the workshop, took out his sister's letter, and read it, and then begged for a sheet of paper and the loan of a pen. He thought he might just as well finish his cigar here, and answer his sister at the same time.

He wrote as follows :—

“ Inverness, September 29.

“ DEAR POLLY—I wish you would be pleased to moderate the rancour of your tongue ; there is quite enough of that commodity at Lynn. Whoever has told you of the latest row has probably not overstepped the truth ; but isn't it a blessed dispensation of Providence that one can obtain a little peace at the Station Hotel ? However, that is becoming slow. I wish I knew where Jack Melville is ; I would propose a little foreign travel. For one thing, I certainly don't mean to go back to Lynn until Mr. Winterbourne has left Allt-nam-ba ; of course, he must see very well that the people at the Towers have cut him ; and no doubt he understands the reason ; and he might ask, don't you see ; and very likely he might get angry and indignant (I shouldn't blame him), and then he might ask Yolande to break off the engagement. Such things have happened before. But you needn't get wild with *me*. I don't seek to break off the engagement ; certainly not ; if that is what they are aiming at they will find me just as pertinaacious as you were about Graham (you needn't assume that you have all the obstinacy in the world) ; and although I'm

not too squeamish about most things, still I'm not going to break my word simply because Aunty Tab doesn't like Mr. Winterbourne's politics.

"Now there's a chance for you, Miss Polly. Why don't you set to work to make the leopard change his spots? You think you can talk anybody over. Why don't you talk over Mr. Winterbourne into the paths of virtue and high Toryism? I don't see why it should be so difficult. Of course he's violent enough in the House; but that's to keep in with his constituents; and to talk with him after a day's shooting you wouldn't guess he had any politics at all. I'd bet a sovereign he would rather get a royal than be made a Cabinet Minister. You'd much better go and coax him into the paths of the just than keep getting into rages with me. You talk as if it was you that wanted to marry Yolande; or rather, as if it was you who were going to buy the Corrievreak side from Sir John, and couldn't wait for the conveyancing to be done. Such impetuosity isn't in accord with your advancing years. The fact is, you haven't been having your fair dose of flirtation lately, and you're in a bad temper. But why with me? I didn't ask the people to Inverstroy. I can see what sort of people they are by the cartload of heads Graham has sent here (I am writing in Macleay's shop). If ever I can afford to keep our forest in my own hands there won't be anything of that kind going on—no matter who is in the house.

"And why should you call upon me for the explanation of the 'mystery'? What mystery is involved in Yolande's going south? Her father, I understand, leaves on the 15th of October; and I am not surprised that nothing has been said about a lease of the place. Of course, Winterbourne must understand. But in the south, my dear Polly, if you would only look at the reasonable aspect of affairs, we may all of us meet on less embarrassing terms; and I for one shall not be sorry to get away for the winter from the society of Tabby and Co. Yolande and I have not quarrelled in the least; on that point you may keep your hair smooth. But I am not at all sure that I am not bound in honour to tell her how I am placed; and what treatment in the future—or rather what no-treatment—she may expect from my affectionate relatives. Of course it cannot matter to her. She will be independent of

them—I also. But I think I ought to let her know; so that she will not be surprised at their silence; and of course if she resents their attitude to her father (as is very likely)—well, that is their fault, not mine. I am not going to argue any more about it; and as for anything like begging for their patronage or sufferance of Yolande, that is entirely out of the question. *I will not have it*; and I have told you so before; so there may just as well be an end to your lecturing. I am a vertebrate animal.

"Yolande is at Worthing—not in London, as you seem to think. I don't know her address; but I have written to Alltnam-ba for it—I believe she left rather in a hurry. No; I shan't send it to you; for you would probably only make mischief by interfering; and indeed it is not with her that any persuasion is necessary. Persuasion?—it's a little common sense that is necessary! But that kind of plant doesn't flourish at the Towers—I never heard of Jack Melville getting it for his collection of dried weeds.

"Well, good-bye. Don't tear your hair.—Your affectionate brother,
ARCHIE."

"P.S.—It is very kind of you to remind me of Baby's birthday; but how on earth do you expect me to know what to send it? A rocking-horse, or a Latin Grammar, or what?"

He leisurely folded the letter, put it in an envelope, and addressed it; then he turned to have a further chat with Mr. Macleay about the various triumphs of the taxidermic art standing around. Several of these were in the window; and he was idly regarding them when he caught sight—through the panes—of some one passing by outside. For a second he seemed to pause, irresolute; then he quickly said good-morning to Mr. Macleay, went outside, threw away his cigar, and followed the figure that he had seen passing the window. It was that of a young woman, neatly dressed; indeed it was no other than Shena Vên—though probably Janet Stewart had acquired that name when she was younger, for now she could not strictly be described as fair, though her hair was of a light brown and her eyes of a deep and exceedingly pretty blue.

"Good-morning, Miss Stewart," said he, overtaking her.

The young lady turned quickly, perhaps, with a slight touch of alarm as well as of surprise in her look.

"Oh, good-morning, Mr. Leslie," said she, with a certain reserve—not to say coldness—of manner; though the sound of her speech, with its slight accent, was naturally gentle and winning.

"I had no idea you were in Inverness," said he. "I just caught a glimpse of you while I was in Macleay's shop. Why, it is a long time since I have seen you now."

She was a little embarrassed and nervous; probably desirous of getting away, and yet not wishing to be rude.

"I am often in Inverness, now," she said, with her eyes averted, "since my sister was married."

"Are you going to the steamer?" he asked, for she carried a small parcel in her hand.

"Yes," said she, with some hesitation. "I—I was thinking of walking to the steamer."

"Then I suppose I may go as far with you," said he, "for I have a letter that I want the clerk to have sent on to Inverstry."

She glanced quickly up and down the street; but he did not give her time to say yea or nay; and then, with something of silence and resentment on her part, they set out together. It was a very pleasant and cheerful morning; and their way was out into the country; for Miss Stewart's destination was that lock on the Caledonian Canal from which the steamer daily sails for the south. Nevertheless the young lady did not seem over well pleased.

At first they talked chiefly about her friends and relatives—he asking the questions and she answering with somewhat few words; and she was careful to inform him that now she was more than ever likely to be away from Inverness-shire, for her brother had recently been elected to one of the professorships at Aberdeen, and he had taken a house there, and he liked to have her in the house, because of looking after things. She gave him to understand that there was a good deal of society in the ancient city of Aberdeen; and that the young men of the University were anxious to visit at her brother's house.

"It is a natural thing," said pretty Shena Ván, with a touch

of pride in her tone, "for the young men to be glad to be friends with my brother; not only because he is one of the professors, but because he was very distinguished at Edinburgh, and at Heidelberg too—very distinguished indeed."

"Oh yes; I know that," said the Master of Lynn, warmly. "I have heard Jack Melville speak of him. I daresay your father is very proud of his success."

"Indeed, I think we are all rather proud of it," said Miss Stewart.

But when they had crossed the bridge over the wide and shallow waters of the Ness, and were getting away from the town into the quietude of the country, he endeavoured to win over his companion to something more of friendliness. He was a gentle-spoken youth; and this coldness on the part of his ancient comrade he seemed to consider unfair.

"We used to be great friends," said he, "but I suppose you have forgotten all that. I suppose you have forgotten the time when Shena Vàn was reaching out for the branch of a rowan-tree and fell into the burn?"

She blushed deeply; but there was the same cold reserve in her manner as she said—

"That was a long time ago."

"Sometimes," said he, with a sort of gentleness in his look, "I wish your father had never gone away to Strathaylort; you and I used to be great friends at one time."

"My father is very well pleased with Strathaylort," said Miss Stewart, "and so are we all; for the manse is larger; and we have many more friends in Strathaylort. And the friends we left—well, I suppose, they can remember us when they wish to remember us."

This was rather pointed; but he took no notice of it—he was so anxious to win his companion over to a more conciliatory mood.

"And are you as fond of reading poetry as ever?" said he, regarding her—but always her eyes were averted.

"Sometimes I read poetry as I read other things," she said, "but with my sister in Inverness and my brother in Aberdeen, I am very often on visits now."

"Do you remember how you used to read 'Horatius' aloud—on the hill above Corrie-an-Eich? And the bridge below

was the bridge that the brave Horatius kept ; and you seemed to see him jump into the Allt Crôm, not the Tiber at all ; and I am quite sure when you held out your finger and pointed when

‘ he saw on Palatinus
, The white porch of his home ’

—you were looking at the zinc-roofed coach-house at Allt-namba.”

“ I was very silly then,” said Shena Vân, with red cheeks.

“ And when you were Boadicea, a flock of sheep did very well as an army for you to address ; only the collies used to think you were mad.”

“ I daresay they were right.”

“ Do you remember the Sword Chant of Thorstein Raudi, and my bringing you a halberd from the Towers ? ‘ Might Giver ! I kiss thee ’—‘ Joy Giver ! I kiss thee ’—‘ Fame Giver ! I kiss thee ’ ? ”

“ Indeed you have a wonderful recollection,” said Miss Stewart. “ I should think it was time to forget such folly. As one grows up there are more serious things to attend to. I am told ”—and here, for the first time, she turned her beautiful dark-blue eyes to him, but not her face ; so that she was looking at him rather askance, and in a curious, interrogative, and at the same time half-combative fashion—“ I am told that you are about to be married.”

Now it was his turn to be embarrassed ; and he did not meet those too searching eyes.

“ As you say, Shena, life turns out to have serious duties, and not to be quite like what one dreams about when one is young,” he observed, somewhat vaguely. “ That can’t prevent your remembering other days with a good deal of affection——”

“ But you must let me congratulate you, Mr. Leslie,” said she, sharply bringing him to his senses. “ And if the wedding is to be at Lynn, I am sure my father would be glad to come over from Strathaylort.”

There could be nothing further said on this rather awkward subject just at the moment, for they had arrived at the steamer, and he had to go and hunt out the clerk to intrust him with those small commissions. Then he rejoined Miss Stewart,

and set out for the town again ; but, while she was quite civil and friendly in a formal fashion, he could not draw her into any sort of conjoint regarding of their youthful and sentimental days. Nay, more ; when they got back to the bridge, she intimated, in the gentlest and most respectful way, that she would rather go through the town alone ; and so he was forced to surrender the cruel solace of her companionship.

"Good-bye, Shena !" said he, and he held her hand for a moment.

"Good-morning, Mr. Leslie," said she, without turning her eyes towards him.

Then he walked away by the side of the river, with a general sense of being aggrieved settling down on him. Whichever way he turned, people seemed only disposed to thwart and controvert him. Surely there was no harm in being on friendly terms with Shena Vân, and in reminding her of the days when he and she were boy and girl together ? If he had jilted her, she would have good grounds for being vexed and angry ; but he had not. Nothing in that direction had ever been spoken of between them. It is true he had at one time been very much in love with her ; and although he had but little romance in his character (that being an ingredient not likely to be fostered by the air of Oxford, or by the society of the young officers of the Seaforth Highlanders), still the glamour of love had for the moment blinded him, and he had seriously contemplated asking her to be his wife. He had argued with himself that this was no stage-case of a noble lord wedding a village maiden ; but the son of an almost penniless peer marrying a well-accomplished young lady of perfectly respectable parentage, a young lady whose beautiful qualities of mind were known only to a few—only to one, perhaps, who had discovered them by looking into the magic mirror of a pair of strangely dark and clear blue eyes. The infatuation was strong—for a time ; but when pretty Mrs. Graham came to learn of it, there was trouble. Now the Master of Lynn detested trouble. Besides, his sister's arguments in this case were terribly cogent. She granted that Shena Vân might be everything he said, and quite entitled, by her intelligence and virtues and amiabilities of character, to become the future mistress of Lynn Towers. But she had not a penny. And was all the labour

that had been bestowed on freeing the estate from its burdens to be thrown away? Were the Leslies to remain in those pinched circumstances that prevented their taking their proper place in the country, to say nothing of London? Mrs. Graham begged and implored; there was some distant and awful thunder on the part of his lordship; and then Archie Leslie (who hated fuss) began to withdraw himself from the fatal magnetism of those dark-blue eyes. Nothing had been said; Miss Stewart could not complain. But the beautiful blue eyes had a measure of shrewdness in them; she may have guessed; nay, more—she may have hoped, and even cherished her own little romantic dreams of affection. Be that as it may, the young Master of Lynn gave way to those entreaties, to that warning of storm. When his sister said he was going to make a fool of himself, he got angry; but at the same time he saw as clearly as she that Lynn was starved for want of money. And although love's young dream might never return in all its freshness of wonder and longing, still there were a large number of pretty and handsome young women in this country, some one of whom (if her eyes had not quite the depth and clearness of the eyes of Shena Ván) might look very well at the head of the dinner-table at Lynn Towers. And so for a time he left Lynn, and went away to Edinburgh; and if his disappointment and isolation did drive him into composing a little song with the refrain,

“ O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go ”

—that was only the last up-flickering flame from the dust and ashes of the extinguished romance; and the Master of Lynn had done everything that was required of him, and had a fair right to expect that his relatives would remember that in the future.

And now it can be well understood how, as he walked alone along the shores of the wide river, he should feel that he had been ill-treated. Not even Janet Stewart's friendship was left to him. He had looked once more into those blue eyes; and he could remember them shining with laughter or dilated with an awful majesty, as Boadicea addressed an army of sheep, or perhaps softening a little in farewell when he was going

away to Oxford; but now there was nothing but coldness. She did not care to recall the old days. And, indeed, as he walked on and out into the country, some other verses that he had learned from Shena Vân in those bygone days began to come into his head; and he grew in a way to compassionate himself, and to think of himself in future years as looking back upon his youth with a strange and pathetic regret—mingled with some other feelings.

*"Oh, mind ye, love, how oft we left
The deavin, dinsome town,
To wander by the green burn-side
And hear its water croon?
The simmer leaves hung ower our heads,
The flowers burst round our feet,
And in the gloamin' o' the wood
The throssil whistled sweet.*

* * * * *

*"Oh dear, dear Jeanie Morrison,
Since we were sindered young,
I've never seen your face, nor heard
The music o' your tongue;
But I could hug all wretchedness,
And happy could I dee,
Did I but ken your heart still dreamed
O' bygane days and me!"*

These were some of the lines he remembered (they were great favourites of Shena Vân in former times); but instead of this compassionating of himself by proxy, as it were, leading him to any gentleness of feeling, it only made him the more bitter and angry. "I have had enough of this—I have had enough of it," he kept repeating to himself. "Very few men I know have kept as straight as I have. They'd better look out. I have had just about enough of this."

That evening he dined with the officers at Fort George, and drank far more wine than he usually did—for he was very abstemious in that direction. After dinner, he proposed unlimited loo; but more moderate counsels prevailed, and the familiar and innocent sixpenny Nap was agreed upon. But even at this mild performance you can lose a fair amount if

you persistently "go Nap" on almost any sort of a hand that turns up.

CHAPTER XL.

A GUESS.

SOME well-known pieces of writing have described to us the ecstatic visions vouchsafed to the incipient opium-eater; and these, or some of these, may be a faithful enough record. At all events, Yolande's first and only experience was of a very different character. All through that terrible night one horror succeeded another; and always she felt as if she were bound and gagged—that she could neither flee away from those hideous things nor shriek out her fear and cry for aid. First she was in a vast forest of impenetrable gloom; it was night, and yet there was a grayness in the open glade; there was no sky visible; she was alone. Then down one of these glades came a slow procession—figures walking two by two; and at first she thought they were monks, but as she came nearer she could see that within each cloak and hood there was a skeleton, with eyes of white fire. They took no heed of her; she could not move; in the awful silence she beheld them range themselves behind the trunks of the great oaks, and although they were now invisible it appeared to her that she could still see their eyes of fire, and that they were gazing on the figure of a woman that now drew near. The woman was wringing her hands; her hair was dishevelled; she looked neither to the right nor to the left. And, then, as she passed, the spectres came out two by two, and formed a crowd and followed her; they pressed on her and surrounded her, though she did not seem to see them; it was a doom overtaking her; the night grew darker; a funeral song was heard far away—not as from any opening heavens, but within the black hollows of the wood—and then the ghastly pageant disappeared.

Presently she was in a white world of snow and ice, and a frantic despair had seized her, for she knew that she was drifting away from the land. This way and that she tried to

escape ; but always she came to a blue impassable chasm ; she tried to spring from one side to the other, but something held her back ; she could not get away. There was a fire-mountain there—the red flames looking so strange in the middle of the white world ; and the noise of the roaring of it was growing fainter and more faint as she floated away on this moving ice. The sea that she was entering—she could see it far ahead of her—was black ; but a thin gray mist hung over it ; and she knew that once she was within that mist she would see nothing more, nor be heard of more, for ever and ever. She tried no longer to escape ; horror had paralysed her ; she wanted to call aloud for help, but could not. Denser and denser grew the mist ; and now the black sea was all around her ; she was as one already dead ; and when she tried to think of those she was leaving for ever, she could not remember them. Her friends ?—the people she knew ?—she could remember nothing. This vague terror and hopelessness filled her mind ; otherwise it was a blank ; she could look, but she could not think—and now the black waters had reached almost to her feet, and around her were the impenetrable folds of air so that she could no longer see.

And so she passed from one vision of terror to another all through the long night ; until in the gray of the morning she slowly awoke to a sort of half-stupefied consciousness. She had a headache, so frightful that at first she could scarcely open her eyes ; but she did not mind that ; she was overjoyed that she could convince herself of her escape from those hideous phantoms, and of her being in the actual living world. Then she began to recollect. She thought of what she had done—perhaps with a little touch of pride, as of something that *he* might approve, if ever he should come to know. Then, though her head was throbbing so dreadfully, she cautiously opened her eyes to look around.

No sooner had she done so than Jane, who was awake, stole noiselessly to her young mistress' bedside. Yolande made a gesture to ensure silence—for she saw that her mother was lying asleep ; then she rose, wrapped a shawl round her, and slipped out of the room, followed by her maid.

"What shall I get you, Miss—I have kept the fire alight downstairs—I can get you a cup of tea in a minute."

"No, no, never mind," said Yolande, pressing her hand to

her head. "Tell me about my mother. How long has she been asleep?"

"Not very long. Oh, she has passed a dreadful night—the poor lady. She was so excited at first, I thought she would have killed herself; but in the end she fairly cried herself to sleep, after I got her to lie down on the bed. And you don't feel very ill, Miss, I hope? But it was a terrible thing for you to do."

"What?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said Jane, with a little embarrassment; "but I guessed what you had done. I guessed from what the poor lady said. Oh, you won't do that again, will you, Miss? You might have killed yourself; and then whatever should I have said to your papa? And I don't think you will ever have need to do it again—I heard what the poor lady kept saying to herself—you won't have to do any such terrible thing again—she declares that she will kill herself before you have cause to do that again——"

"I hope there won't be any occasion," said Yolande, calmly; and then she went to the window.

It was truly a miserable morning—dull and gray and overclouded; and it had rained during the night; the street and the terrace were sodden and wet; and a leaden-hued sea tumbled on to the empty beach. But notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding her headache, Yolande vaguely felt that she had never looked on a fairer picture. This plain, matter-of-fact, commonplace world was such a beautiful thing after those phantom horrors through which she had passed. She liked to look at the solid black boats high up on the shingle; at the terraced footway; at the iron railing along the road. She began to wish to be out in that substantial world; to see more of it, and more closely; perhaps the cold sea breezes would temper the racking pain in her head?

"Jane," said she, "do you think you could slip into the room and bring me my things without waking my mother?"

"But you are not going out, Miss?" said the maid, wondering. "The night is scarcely over yet. Won't you go back and lie down?"

"No, no," said Yolande, almost with a shudder of dread. "I have had terrible dreams—I want to get outside—and I

have a headache, besides ; perhaps the fresh air will make it better. But you can lie down, Jane, after I have gone ; and don't wake my mother, no matter how late she sleeps. When I come back perhaps the people in the house will be up, and I shall try to take some breakfast——”

“I could get it for you now, Miss,” said Jane, eagerly.

“I could not touch it,” the girl said, shivering.

The maid went and fetched her things ; and when she had dressed she stole noiselessly down the stairs and got outside. How cold and damp the air felt ; but yet it was fresh and new and strange ; the familiar sound of the sea seemed pleasant and companionable. As yet, in the dull gray dawn, the little town appeared to be asleep ; all the people she could find as she passed were a policeman, leaning against a railing and reading a newspaper, two men working at the roadway, and a maid-servant cleaning the windows of a first-floor parlour. She walked on ; and pushed back the hair from her forehead to let the cool sea breeze dispel this racking pain. But although the headache was a bad one, and although it was a most rare thing for her to know what a headache was, still it did not depress her. She walked on with an increasing gladness. This was a fine real world ; there were no more processions of skeletons, or Arctic mists, or fields covered with coffins. This was Worthing : there was the pier ; these were most substantial and actual waves that came rolling in until they thundered over and rushed seething and hissing up the beach. Moreover, was there not a gathering sense of light somewhere—as if the day were opening and inclined to shine ? As she walked on in the direction of Lower Lancing a more spacious view of sea and sky opened out before her ; and it appeared to her that away in the direction of Brighton the clouds seemed inclined to bank up. And then, gradually and here and there, faint gleams of a warmer light came shooting over from the east ; and in course of time, as she still followed the windings of the shore, the rising sun shone level along the sea, and the yellow-brown waves, though their curved hollows were in shadow as they rolled on to the beach, had silver-gleaming crests, and the wide stretches of retreating foam that gurgled and hissed down the shingly slopes were a glare of cream-white dazzling to the eyes.

She walked quickly—and proudly. She had played a bold game ; and she hoped that she might win. Nay, more, she was prepared to play it again. She would not shrink from any sacrifice ; it was with no light heart that she had undertaken this duty. And would *he* approve?—that was always her secret thought, though generally she tried to banish all remembrances of what was bygone. Should he ever come to know of what she had done? For it was of her own planning. It was not his suggestion at all ; probably, if he had thought of such a means of terrorism, he would not have dared to recommend it. But she had laid this plan ; and she had watched her opportunity ; and she was glad that some days had elapsed before that opportunity had occurred, so that her mother had had time to become attached to her. And what if that once did not suffice? Well, she was prepared to go on. It was only a headache (and even that was quietly lessening, for she had an elastic constitution, and was a most capital walker). What were a few headaches? But no—she did not think that much repetition of this experiment would be necessary ; she could not believe that any mother alive could look on and see her daughter poisoning herself to save her.

The morning cleared and brightened ; when she got to Lancing, she struck inland, by the quiet country ways ; a kind of gladness filled her. And if she should be successful, after all—if the thing that she had feared was to turn out a beautiful thing—if the rescue of this poor mother was to be her reward, what should she not owe him who had told her what her duty was. He had not been afraid to tell her—although she was only a girl. Ah, and where was he now? Driven away into banishment, perhaps, by what had happened up there in the north, through her blindness and carelessness. Once or twice, indeed, during these long evenings, she had followed out a curious fancy that perhaps his crossing the Monalea hills to catch the afternoon train at Kingussie had really some connection with her coming south. Had he wished to see that she was secure and guarded, now that she was embarked on an errand of his suggestion? It pleased her to think of him being in the same train. Perhaps—in the cold gray morning at Euston Station—standing backward from

the people, he had watched her get into the cab ; perhaps he had even followed in his own cab and seen her enter the hotel ? Why should he have hurried to catch that particular train ? Why should he have adopted that arduous route across the hills, unless it was that he wished to travel with her, and yet without her knowing it ? But it was so strange he should make this long journey merely to see that she was safely lodged in her hotel.

Now she had been studying this matter on one or two occasions—and letting her fancy play about it with a strange curiosity—but it was on this particular morning, as she was nearing the little village of Sompting, that a new light suddenly flashed in on her. Who was it who had told Lawrence and Lang of her being in London ? who had explained to them what her business was ? who had asked Mr. Lang to go to her hotel and see her ? Was it possible, then, that he had journeyed to London in that same train, and gone direct to the lawyers' office, so that she should have their assistance ? He knew they were her father's lawyers ; for she herself had told him to whom she should apply in case of difficulty ; whereas, on the other hand, it was not possible for her father to have written. Had he been guarding her, then, and watching over her, all that time—perhaps even looking on ? And if looking on—then, in a breathless kind of way, she recalled the circumstances of her taking her mother away. She had been disturbed and bewildered, no doubt ; still had she not the impression of some one darting by—some one who felled the man who had seized her arm, and then passed quickly by ? Surely, surely it must have been he. Who else could have known ? Who else could have interfered ? Her heart grew warm with gratitude towards him. Ah, there was the true friend—watching over her but still keeping back, and unrequited with a single word of thanks. She began to convince herself that this must have been so. She accused herself of blindness that she had not seen it before. And for how long had his guardianship continued ? When had he gone away ? Perhaps——

Then her face grew pale. Perhaps he was even now in Worthing, still exercising this invisible care over her ? Perhaps she might meet him, by some accident, in the street. She

stopped short in the road, apparently afraid to go on. For what would their meeting be, if such a meeting were to happen? But no, it would not happen—it should not happen. Even if he were in Worthing (and she tried to get rid of the dreams and fancies begotten of this morning walk) he would not seek to see her; he would avoid her rather; he would know, as well as she, that it was not fit and proper that they should meet. And why should he be in Worthing? His guardianship there could be of no avail; she had nothing to fear in any direction where he could help. The more she calmly reviewed the possibilities of the case, the more she considered it likely that he had indeed come to London with her; that he had given instructions to the lawyers; perhaps, even, that he had been present when she bore her mother off. But even if these things were so, by this time he must have left, perceiving that he could do no more. And whither? She had a kind of dim notion that he would not quickly return to Gress. But whither, then, whither? She saw him an outcast and a wanderer; she imagined him away in far places; and the morning seemed less cheerful now. Her face grew grave; she walked firmly on. She was returning to her appointed task, and to any trials that might be in store for her in connection with it.

She was getting near to Broadwater when she saw along the road a pony-carriage coming quickly in her direction; the next moment she perceived that her mother was in it, and that Jane (who had been brought up in the country) was driving. A few seconds sufficed to bring them to her, and then the mother, who seemed much excited, got out from the trap, and caught her daughter by both shoulders, and stroked her hair and her face in a sort of delirium of joy.

“We have been driving everywhere in search of you—I was so afraid—ah, you are alive, and well, and beautiful as ever—my child, my child, I have not murdered you!——”

“Hush, mother,” said the girl, quite calmly. “It is a pity you got up so early. I came out for a walk because my head was bad; it is getting better now; I will drive you back if you like.”

She drew the girl aside for a few yards, caressing her arm and stroking her fingers.

"My child, I ought to be ashamed and miserable ; but to see you alive and well—I—I was in despair—I was afraid. But you need not fear any more, Yolande, you need not fear any more."

"I hope not, mother," said Yolande, gravely, and she regarded her mother ; "for I think I would rather die than go through again such a night as last night."

"But you need not fear—you need not fear!" said the other, pressing her hand. "Oh no. When I saw you lying on the bed last night—then—then I seemed to know what I was. But you need not fear. No, never again will you have to poison yourself in order to shame me."

"It was not to shame you, mother—it was to ask you not to take any more of that—that medicine."

"You need not fear, Yolande, you need not fear!" she repeated, eagerly. "Oh no ; I have everything prepared now. I will never again touch it—you shall never have to sacrifice yourself like that——"

"Well, I am glad of it, dear mother, for both our sakes," Yolande said. "I hope it will not cost you much suffering."

"Oh no, it will not cost me much suffering," said the mother, with a strange sort of smile.

Something in her manner attracted her daughter's attention.

"Shall we go back ?" she asked.

"But I wished you to understand, Yolande, that you need have no longer any fear——"

"You have promised, mother."

"Yes, but did I not promise before? Ah, you—you so young, so strong, so self-reliant—you cannot tell how weak one can be. But now that is all over. This time I know. This time I can tell that I have tasted that poison for the last time—if there were twenty bottles standing by, it would not matter."

"You must nerve yourself, mother——"

"Oh, but I have made it secure in another way," she said, with the same curious smile.

"How then?"

"Well, what am I worth in the world? What is the value of my life? It is a wreck and worthless ; to save it for a week, for a day, would I let you have one more headache, and be driven away into the country by yourself like this? Ah no,

Yolande ; but now you are secure ; there will be no more of that ; when I feel that I must break my promise again—when I am like to die with weakness and—and the craving—then, if there were twenty bottles standing by, you need not fear. If living is not bearable, then, rather than you should do again what you did last night, I will kill myself—and gladly !”

Yolande regarded her with the same calm air.

“And is that the end you have appointed for me, mother ?”

Her mother was stupefied for a second ; then she uttered a short quick cry of terror.

“Yolande, what do you mean ?”

“I think I have told you, mother, that I mean to follow your example in all things—to the end, whatever it may be. Do not let us speak of it.”

She put her hand on her mother’s arm, and led her back to the pony-carriage. But the poor woman was trembling violently. This terrible threat had quite unnerved her. It had seemed to her so easy, if the worst came to the worst—if she could control her craving no longer,—that, sooner than her daughter should be sacrificed, she herself should throw away this worthless fragment of existence that remained to her. And now Yolande’s manner frightened her. This easy way of escape was going to produce the direst of all catastrophes ? She regarded the girl—who was preoccupied and thoughtful, and who allowed Jane to continue to drive—all the way back ; and there was something in her look that sent the conviction to her mother’s heart that that had been no idle menace.

When they got back to Worthing, Yolande set about the usual occupations of the day with her accustomed composure, and even with a measure of cheerfulness. She seemed to attach little importance to the incident that had just happened, and probably wished her mother to understand that she meant to see this thing through as she had begun it. But it was pitiable to see the remorse on the mother’s face when a slight contraction of Yolande’s brow told that from time to time her head still swam with pain.

The first hamper of game from the north arrived that day ; and it was with a curious interest that the mother (who was never done wondering at her daughter’s knowledge and accomplishments and opinions) listened to all that Yolande could tell

her about the various birds and beasts. As yet the ptarmigan showed no signs of donning their winter plumage ; but the mountain hares here and there—especially about the legs—showed traces of white appearing underneath the brownish-gray. Both at the foot and at the top of the hamper was a thick bed of stags-horn moss (which grows in extraordinary luxuriance at Allt-nam-ba), and Yolande guessed—and guessed correctly—that Duncan, who had observed her on one or two occasions bring home some of that moss, had fancied that the young lady would like to have some sent her to the south. And she wondered whether there was any other part of the world where people were so thoughtful and so kind—even to visitors who were almost strangers to them.

At night, when Yolande went into the bedroom, she noticed that there was no bottle on the mantelpiece.

“Where is it, mother?” she said.

“I have thrown it away. You need not fear now, Yolande,” her mother said. And then she regarded her daughter nervously. “Don’t mind what I said this morning, child. It was foolish. If I cannot bear the suffering well, it cannot be so hard a thing to die ; that must come if one waits.”

“You are not going to die, mother,” said Yolande, gently patting her on the shoulder. “You are going to live ; for some day, as soon as you are strong enough, you and I are going to Nice, to drive all the way along to Genoa ; and I know all the prettiest places to stop at. But you must have courage and hope and determination. And you must get well quickly, mother ; for I should like to go away with you ; it is such a long, long time since I smelt the lemon-blossom in the air.”

CHAPTER XLI.

A MESSAGE.

As subsequent events were to prove, Yolande had, by this one bold stroke, achieved the victory she had set her heart upon. But as yet she could not know that. She could not tell that the frantic terror of the poor mother at the thought that she might have killed her only child would leave an impression

strong enough to be a sufficient safeguard. Indeed, she could see no end to the undertaking on which she had entered ; but she was determined to prosecute that with unfailing patience and with hope in the final result ; and also, perhaps, with the consciousness that this immediate duty absorbed her from the consideration of other problems of her life.

But while she tried to shut up all her cares and interests within this little town of Worthing—devising new amusements and occupations, keeping her mother as much as possible in the open air, and lightly putting aside the poor woman's remorse over the incidents of that critical night—there came to her reminders from the outer and further world. Among these was the following letter from the Master of Lynn, which she read with strangely diverse emotions contending for mastery in her mind :—

“ Station Hotel, Inverness, October 2.

“ MY DEAREST YOLANDE—It is only this morning that I have got your address from Allt-nam-ba ; and I write at once, though perhaps you will not care to be bothered with much correspondence just at present. Your father has told me what has taken you to the south ; and indeed I had guessed something of the kind from the note you sent me when you were leaving. I hope you are well, and not over-troubled ; and when you have time I should be glad to have a line from you—though I shall not misconstrue your silence if you prefer to be silent. In fact, I probably should not write to you now but that your father is leaving Allt-nam-ba shortly ; and I suppose he will see you as soon as he goes south ; and I think I am bound to give you some explanation as to how matters stand. No doubt he will think it strange that I have rather kept out of his way ; and very likely he will be surprised that my father has never called at the lodge, or shown any sign of civility, and so forth. Well, the plain truth is, dear Yolande, that I have quarrelled with my father, if that can be called a quarrel which is all on one side—for I simply retire, on my part, and seek quiet in an Inverness hotel. The cause of the quarrel, or estrangement, is that he is opposed to our marriage ; and he has been put up to oppose it, I imagine, chiefly by my aunt, the elderly and agreeable lady whom you will remember meeting at the Towers. I think I am bound in honour to let

you know this ; not that it in the least affects either you or me, as far as our marriage is concerned, for I am old enough to manage my own affairs ; but in order to explain a discourtesy which may very naturally have offended your father, and also to explain why I, feeling ashamed of the whole business, have rather kept back, and so failed to thank your father, as otherwise I should have done, for his kindness to me. Of course I knew very well when we became engaged in Egypt that my father, whose political opinions are of a fine old crusted order, would be rather aghast at my marrying the daughter of the Member for Slagpool ; but I felt sure that when he saw you and knew you, dear Yolande, he would have no further objection ; and indeed I did not anticipate that the eloquence of my venerated aunt would have deprived him of the use of his senses. One ought not to write so of one's parent, I know ; but facts are facts ; and if you are driven out of your own home through the bigotry of an old man and the cattish temper of an old woman, and if you have the most angelic of sisters taken to nagging at you with letters, and if you are forced into the sweet seclusion of a hotel adjoining a railway-station, then the humour of the whole affair begins to be apparent, and you may be inclined to call things by their real names. I have written to your father to say that he need not bother about either the dogs or the horses ; when he has left I will run down to Allt-nam-ba and see them sent off ; but I have not told him why I am at present in Inverness ; and I tell you, my dear Yolande, because I think you ought to know exactly how matters stand. I should not be at all surprised to hear from you that you had imagined something of the state of the case ; for you must have wondered at their not asking you and your father to dinner, or something of the kind, after Polly taking you to the Towers when you first came north ; but at all events, this is how we are situated now, and I should be inclined to make a joke of the whole affair, if it were not that when I think of you I feel a little bit indignant. Of course, it cannot matter to you—not in the least. It is disagreeable, that is all. If dogs delight to bark and bite, it does not much matter so long as they keep their barking and biting among themselves. It is rather hard, certainly, when they take possession of your house, and turn you out into the street ; especially when you

have a lovely sister come and accuse you of having no higher ambition in life than playing billiards with commercial travellers.

"I shall hang on here, I expect, until our other tenants—they who have the forest—leave for the south; then I shall be able to make some final arrangements with our agent here; after which I shall consider myself free. You must tell me, dear Yolande, when and where you wish to see me—of course, I don't wish to inconvenience or trouble you in any way—I shall leave it entirely in your hands as to what you would have me do. Perhaps, if I go away for a while, the people at Lynn may come to their senses. Polly has been at them once or twice; she is a warm ally of yours; but, to tell you the truth, I would not have you made the subject of any appeal. No word of that kind shall come from me. Most likely when the last of the people that the Grahams have with them at Inverstroy have gone, Polly may go over to Lynn and establish herself there, and have a battle-royal with my revered aunt. Of course I would not bother you with the details of this wretched family squabble if I did not think that some explanation were due both to you and to your father.

"I shall be glad to hear from you, if you are not too much occupied.—Yours affectionately, ARCHIE LESLIE."

"*P.S.*—I hope to be able to leave here about the 22d."

Her first impulse was to rush away at once and telegraph to him, begging him not to come south; but a moment's reflection showed her that was unnecessary. She re-read the letter; there was nothing of the impetuosity of a lover in it, but rather a studied kindness, and also a reticence with regard to her present surroundings and occupations that she could not but respect. For she knew as well as any one that this matter concerned him, too; and she could even have forgiven a trace of apprehension on his part—seeing that a young man about to marry is naturally curious about the new conditions that are to surround him. His silence on this point seemed part of the careful consideration that prevailed throughout this message to her. Then it was so clear that he would be ruled by her wishes. He was not coming to claim her by the right he had acquired. She could put away this letter for future consideration, as she had for the moment put aside her engage-

ment-ring. While she was first reading it, some strange fancies and feelings had held possession of her—a quick contrition ; a desire to tell him everything, and so release herself from this bond ; a remonstrance with herself, and a vague kind of hope that she might make atonement by a lifelong devotion to him, after this first duty to her mother had been accomplished. But these conflicting resolves she forced herself to discard. She would not even answer this letter now. There was no hurry. He would not come to Worthing if she did not wish it. And was it not fortunate that she could turn aside from unavailing regrets and from irresolute means and purposes to the actual needs of the moment ? She calmly put the letter in her pocket, and went away to see whether her mother were not ready for her morning drive. And now it had come to pass that whenever Yolande drew near there was a look of affection and gratitude in this poor woman's eyes that made the girl's heart glad.

Day after day passed ; the weather happened to be fine, and their exploration of the surrounding country was unwearied. The castles of Arundel and Bramber, the parks of Angmering and Badworth, Harrow Hill, Amberley Wild Brook, Sullington, Washington, Storrington, Ashington—they knew them all ; and they had so educated the wise old pony that, when Jane was not with them, and they were walking along by the hedgeways or climbing a hill, they could safely leave him and the pony-carriage far behind them, knowing that he would come up at his leisure, keeping his own side of the road, and refusing to be tempted by the greenest of wayside patches. Yolande, both at home and abroad, was always on the watch, and carefully concealed the fact. But now she was beginning less and less to fear, and more and more to hope ; nay, at times, and rather in spite of herself, a joyful conviction would rest upon her that she had already succeeded. Four days after that relapse, a desperate fit of depression overtook the poor woman ; but she bravely fought through it.

“You need not fear this time, Yolande,” she would say, with a sad smile. “I said that once before, but I did not know then. I had not seen you lying on the bed—perhaps dying, as I thought. You shall have no more headaches through me.”

"Ah, dear mother," said Yolande, "in a little time you will not even think of such things. You will have forgotten them. It will be all like a dream to you."

"Yes, like a dream—like a dream"—the other said, absently. "It was in a dream that you came to me. I could not understand. I heard you, but I could not understand. And then it seemed that you were leading me away, but I scarcely knew who you were. And the evening in the hotel, when you were showing me your things, I could scarcely believe it all; and when you said you would get me a dressing-bag, I asked myself why I should take that from a stranger. You were so new to me—and tall—and so beautiful—it was a kind of wonder—I could not think you were indeed my own daughter—but a kind of angel—and I was glad to follow you."

"Well, I carried you off," said Yolande, plainly (for she did not like to encourage fantasy). "There is no mistake about it; and I shall not let you go back to those friends of yours who were not at all good friends to you—that also is quite certain."

"Oh no, no," she would say, grasping the girl's hand. "I am not going back—never, never, to that house. You need not fear now, Yolande."

It has already been mentioned that this poor woman was greatly astonished that Yolande should know so much, and should have seen so much, and read so many different things. And this proved to be a field of quite unlimited interest; for there was not a single opinion or experience of the girl that she did not regard with a strange fascination and sympathy. Whether Yolande was relating to her legendary stories of Brittany, of which she knew a good many, or describing the lonely streets of Pompeii, or telling her of the extraordinary clearness of the atmosphere in Washington (the physical atmosphere, that is), she listened with a kind of wonder, and with the keenest curiosity to know more and more of this young life that had grown up apart from hers. And then Yolande so far wandered from the path of virtue—as laid down by her father—as sometimes to read aloud in French; and while she frequently halted and stumbled in reading aloud in English, there never was any stumbling, but rather a

touch of pride, when she was pronouncing such sonorous lines as this—

“La vaste mer murmure autour de son cercueil”

—and it was strange to the poor mother that her daughter should be more at home in reading French than in reading English. She would ask the minutest questions—about Yolande’s life at the Château, about her life on board ship during her various voyages, about her experiences in those mountain solitudes of the north. Her anxiety to be always in the society of her daughter was insatiable ; she could scarcely bear to have her out of her sight. And when Lawrence and Lang sent her, in the course of time, her usual allowance of money, her joy was extreme. For now, whenever she and Yolande went out, she scanned the shop-windows with an eager interest, and always she was buying this, that, or the other trinket, or bit of pretty-coloured silk, or something of the kind for the girl to wear. Yolande had rather severe notions in the way of personal adornment; but she was well content to put a bit of colour round her neck or an additional silver hoop round her wrist when she saw the pleasure in her mother’s eyes.

At length she felt justified in sending the following letter to her father :—

“Worthing, October 12.

“MY DEAR PAPA—I intend this to reach you before you leave Allt-nam-ba, because it carries good news ; and I know you have been anxious. I think everything goes well—sometimes I am quite sure of it—sometimes I look forward to such a bright future. It has been a great struggle and pain (but not to me, please do not speak of me at all in your letters, because that is nothing at all), but I have not so much fear now. Perhaps it is too soon to be certain ; but I cannot explain to you in a letter what it is that gives me such hope ; that drives away what reason suggests, and *compels* me to think that all will be well. Partly, it is my mother’s look. There is an assurance in it of her determination—of her feeling that all is safe now ; again and again she says to me, ‘I have been in a dream ; but now I am come out of it. You need not fear now.’ Mr. Melville said I was not to be too sanguine, and always to be watchful ; and I try to be that ; but I cannot

fight against the joyful conviction that my mother is now safe from that thing. Only, she is so weak and ill yet—she tries to be brave and cheerful to give me comfort ; but she suffers. Dear papa, it is madness that you should reproach yourself for doing nothing, and propose to take us to the Mediterranean. No, no ; it will not do at all. My mother is too weak yet to go anywhere ; when she is well enough to go I will take her ; but I must take her alone ; she is now used to me ; there must be no such excitement as would exist if you were to come for us. I am very thankful to Mr. Shortlands that you are going to Dalescroft ; and I hope you will find charming people at his house, and also that the shooting is good. Dear papa, I hope you will be able to go over to Slagpool while you are in the north ; and perhaps you might give an address or deliver a lecture—there are many of the Members doing that now, as I see by the newspapers, and you owe something to your constituents for not grumbling about your going to Egypt.

“I hope everything has been comfortable at the lodge since I left ; but that I am sure of, for Mrs. Bell would take care. You must buy her something very pretty when you get to Inverness, and send it to her as from you and me together—something very pretty, indeed, papa, for she was very kind to me, and I would not have her fancy that one forgets. Mr. Leslie says in a letter that he will see to the ponies and dogs being sent off, so that you need have no trouble ; he is at the Station Hotel, as probably you know, if you wish to call and thank him. I remember Duncan saying that when the dogs were going he would take them over the hills to Kingussie and go with them by the train as far as Perth, where he has relatives, and there he could see that the dogs had water given them in the morning. But you will yourselves take them, perhaps, from Inverness? Another small matter, dear papa, if you do not mind the trouble, is this—would you ask some one to pack up for me and send here the boards and drying paper and hand-press that I had for the wild flowers? We go much into the country here, and have plenty of time in the evening ; and my mother is so much interested in any pursuit of mine that this would be an additional means of amusing her. You do not say whether you have heard anything further of Mr. Melville.

“Do not think I am sad, or alone, or repining. Oh no ; I

am very well ; and I am very happy when I see my mother pleased with me. We do a hundred things—examine the shop-windows, walk on the pier or along the promenade, or we drive to different places in the country, and sometimes we have lunch at the old-fashioned inns, and make the acquaintance of the people. So good-natured they are, and well-pleased with their own importance ; but I do not understand them always, and my mother laughs. We call the pony Bertrand du Guesclin ; I do not remember how it happened ; but at all events he is not as adventurous as the Connétable : he is too wise to run any risks. But *when I am quite sure*, and if my mother is well enough for the fatigue of the voyage, I think I will take her to the south of France, and then along the Riviera, for I fear the winter here, and she so delicate. Dear papa, you say I am not to mind the expense—very well, you see I am profiting by your commands. In the meantime I would not dare. I try to keep down my excitement—we amuse ourselves with the shops, with the driving, and what not—it is all simple, pleasant, and I wait for the return of her strength. Yes, I can see she is much depressed, sometimes ; and then it is that she has been accustomed to fly for relief to the medicines ; but now I think that is over, and the best to be looked forward to. Yes, in spite of caution, in spite of reason, I am already almost assured. There is something in her manner towards me that convinces me—there is a sympathy which has grown up—she looks at me as she does not look at any one else, and I understand. It is this that convinces me.

“Will you give a farewell gift to each of the servants, besides their wages? I think they deserve it ; always they helped me greatly, and were so willing and obliging, instead of taking advantage of my ignorance. I would not have them think that I did not recognise it, and was ungrateful. And *please*, papa, get something *very* pretty for Mrs. Bell, I do not know what. Something she could be proud to show to Mr. Melville would probably please her best.

“Write to me when you get to Dalescourt.—Your affectionate daughter,
“YOLANDE.”

There is no doubt that Yolande made those repeated references to Mr. Melville with the vague expectation of

learning that perhaps he had returned to Gress. But if that was her impression she was speedily undeceived. The very next morning, as she went down into the small lobby, she saw something white in the letter-box of the door. The bell had not been rung, so that the servant-maid had not taken the letter out. Yolande did so, and saw that it was addressed to herself—in a handwriting that she instantly recognised. With trembling fingers she hastily broke open the envelope; and then read these words, written in pencil across a sheet of notepaper:—

“ You have done well. You will succeed. But be patient. Good-bye.—J. M.”

She stood still—bewildered—her heart beating quickly. Had he been there all the time, then?—always near her; watching her; guarding her; observing the progress of the experiment he had himself suggested? And now, whither had he gone—without a word of thanks and gratitude? Her mother was coming down the stairs. She quickly concealed the letter, and turned to meet her. In the dusk of this lobby the mother observed nothing strange or unusual in the look of her daughter’s face.

CHAPTER XLII.

A LAST INTERVENTION.

It has already been said of Mrs. Graham, as of her brother, that she was not altogether mercenary. She had a certain share of sentiment in her composition. It is true, she had summarily stamped out the Master’s boyish fancies with regard to Janet Stewart; but then, on the other hand (when the danger to the estates of Lynn was warded off), she could afford to cherish those verses to Shena Vân with a sneaking fondness. Nay, more than that, she paid them the compliment of imitation—unknown to her husband and everybody else; and it may be worth while to print this, her sole and only literary effort, if only to show that, just as sempstresses imagine the highest social circles to be the realm of true romance, and like to be

told of the woes and joys of high-born ladies, so this pretty Mrs. Graham, being the only daughter of a nobleman, when casting about for a properly sentimental situation, must needs get right down to the bottom of the social ladder, and think it fine to speak of herself as a sailor's lass. One small touch of reality remained—the hero she named Jim. But here are the verses to speak for themselves :—

*" I care not a fig for your brag, you girls
And dames of high degree ;
Or for all your silks and satins and pearls,
As fine as fine may be ;
For I'll be as rich as dukes and earls
When my Jim comes home from sea.*

*" It's in Portsmouth town that I know a lane,
And a small house jolly and free,
That's sheltered well from the wind and the rain,
And as snug as snug can be ;
And it's there that we'll be sitting again
When my Jim comes home from sea.*

*" 'Twas a fine brave sight when the yards were manned,
Though my eyes could scarcely see ;
It's a long, long sail to the Rio Grand',
And a long, long waiting for me ;
But I'll envy not any one in the land
When my Jim comes home from sea.*

*" So here's to your health, you high-born girls
And ladies of great degree ;
And I hope you'll all be married to earls,
As proud as proud may be ;
But I wouldn't give fourpence for all of your pearls
When my Jim comes home from sea."*

Of course, she carefully concealed these verses—especially from her husband, who would have led her a sad life if he had found them and discovered the authorship ; and they never attained to the dignity of type in the *Inverness Courier*, where the lines to Shena Vàn had appeared ; but all the same pretty Mrs. Graham regarded them with a certain pleasure, and rather approved of the independence of the Portsmouth young lady, although she had a vague impression that she might not be quite the proper sort of guest to ask to Inverstroy.

Now her anger and dismay over the possible breaking down of the scheme which she had so carefully formed and tended were due to various causes, and did not simply arise from a wish that the Master of Lynn should marry a rich wife. It was her project, for one thing; and she had a certain sentimental fondness in regarding it. Had she not wrought for it, too, and striven for it? Was it for nothing that she had trudged through the dust of the Merhadj bazaars, and fought with cockroaches in her cabin, and gasped with the Egyptian heat all those sweltering afternoons? She began to consider herself ill-treated, and did not know which to complain of the more—her brother's indifference or her father's obstinacy. Then she could get no sort of sympathy from her husband. He only laughed—and went away to look after his pheasants. Moreover, she knew very well that this present condition of affairs could not last. The Master's ill-temper would increase rather than abate. Yolande would grow accustomed to his neglect of her. Perhaps Mr. Winterbourne would interfere and finally put an end to that pretty dream she had dreamed about as they went sailing down the Mediterranean.

Accordingly she determined to make one more effort. If she should not be able to coax Lord Lynn into a more complaisant frame of mind, at least she could go on to Alltnam-ba and make matters as pleasant as possible with Mr. Winterbourne before he left. The former part of her endeavour, indeed, she speedily found to be hopeless. She had no sooner arrived at the Towers than she sought out her father and begged him to be less obdurate; but when, as she was putting forward Corrievreak as her chief argument, she was met by her father's affixing to Corrievreak, or rather prefixing to it, a solitary and emphatic word—a word that was entirely out of place, too, as applied to a sanctuary—she knew it was all over. Lord Lynn sometimes used violent language, for he was a hot-tempered man; but not language of that sort; and when she heard him utter that dreadful wish about such a sacred thing as the sanctuary of a deer-forest she felt it was needless to continue further.

“Very well, papa,” said she, “I have done my best. It is not my affair. Only everything might have been made so pleasant for us all——”

"Yes, and for the Slagpool Radicals," her father said, contemptuously. "I suppose they would land at Foyers, with banners; and have picnics in the forest!"

"At all events, you must remember this, papa," said Mrs. Graham, with some sharpness, "that Archie is a gentleman. He is pledged to marry Miss Winterbourne. And marry her he will."

"Let him and welcome!" said this short, stout, thick person with the bushy eyebrows and angry eyes. "He may marry the dairymaid if he likes. I suppose the young gentleman has a right to his own tastes. But I say he shall not bring his low acquaintances about this house while I am alive!"

Mrs. Graham herself had a touch of the family temper; and for a second or two her face turned quite pale with anger; and when she spoke it was in a kind of forced and breathless way.

"I don't know what you mean. Who are low acquaintances? Yolande Winterbourne is my friend. She is fit to marry any one in the land—I care not what his rank is—and—and I will not have such things said—she is my friend. Low acquaintances?—if it comes to that, it was I who introduced Archie to Mr. Winterbourne—and—and this is what I know about them, that if they are not fit to—to be received at Lynn, then neither am I!"

And with that she walked calmly (but still with her face rather pale) out of the room, and shut the door behind her; and then went away and sought out her own dressing-room of former days, and locked herself in there and had a good cry. She did feel injured. She was doing her best, and this was what she got for it. But she was a courageous little woman, and presently she had dried her eyes and arranged her dress for going out; then she rang and sent a message to the stables to get the dog-cart ready, for that she wanted to drive to Allt-nam-ba.

By and by she was driving along by the side of the pretty loch, under the great hills; and she was comforting herself with more cheerful reflections.

"It is no matter," she was saying to herself. "If only Mr. Winterbourne remains in good humour, everything will go right. When Archie is married, he will be rich enough to

have a home where he pleases. I suppose Jim wouldn't have them always with us?—though it would be nice to have Yolande in the house, especially in the long winter months. But Archie could build a house for himself; and sell it when he no longer wanted it. The country about Loch Eil would please Yolande; I wonder if Archie could get a piece of land anywhere near Fassiefern; that would be handy for having a yacht, too, and of course they will have a yacht. Or why shouldn't he merely rent a house—one of those up Glen Urquhart, if only the shooting was a little better; or over Glen Spean way, if Lochaber isn't a little too wild for Yolande; or perhaps they might get a place in Glengarry, for Yolande is so fond of wandering through woods. No doubt Archie exaggerated that affair about Yolande's mother; in any case it could easily be arranged; other families have done so, and everything gone on as usual. Then if they had a town-house we might all go to the Caledonian Ball together; Archie looks so well in the kilt; and Yolande might go as Flora Macdonald."

She drove quickly along the loch-side, but moderated her pace when she reached the rough mountain-road leading up the glen, for she knew she would not mend matters by letting down one of her father's horses. And as she approached Allt-nam-ba a chill struck her heart—those preparations for departure were so ominous. Duncan was in front of the bothy, giving the rifles and guns their last rub with oil before putting them into the cases; boxes of empty soda-water bottles had been hauled out by the women-folk for the men to screw up; a cart with its shafts resting on the ground stood outside the coach-house; and various figures went hurrying this way and that. And no sooner had Mrs. Graham driven up and got down from the dog-cart, than her quick eye espied a tall black-bearded man who, from natural shyness—or perhaps he wanted to have a look at Duncan's gun-rack—had retreated into the bothy; and so, instead of going into the house, she quickly followed him into the wide low-roofed apartment, which smelt considerably of tobacco-smoke.

"Isn't your name Angus?" said she.

"Yes, ma'am," said he, with a very large smile, that showed he recognised her.

"I suppose Mr. Macpherson has sent you about the inventory?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Have you been over the house yet?"

"No, ma'am; I have just come out with the empty cart from Inverfariguig."

"Well, then, Angus, you need not go over the house. I don't want the gentlemen bothered. Go back and tell Mr. Macpherson I said so."

"There was £7 of breakages with the last tenant, ma'am," said he, very respectfully.

"Never mind," said she; and she took out her purse, and got hold of a sovereign. "Go back at once; and if you have to sleep at Whitebridge that will pay the cost; or you may get a lift in the mail-cart. My brother is in Inverness, isn't he?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then you can go to him, and tell him I said there was to be no going over the inventory. This tenant is a friend of mine. You go to my brother when you get to Inverness, and he will explain to Mr. Macpherson. Now good-bye, Angus"—and she shook hands with him, as is the custom in that part of the country, and went.

The arrival of a stranger at Allt-nam-ba was such an unusual circumstance that, when she went up to the door of the lodge, she found both Mr. Winterbourne and John Shortlands awaiting her—they having seen her drive up the glen; and she explained that she had been leaving a message with one of the men.

"I heard you were leaving, Mr. Winterbourne," said she, with one of her most charming smiles, when they had got into the drawing-room, "and I could not let you go away without coming to say good-bye. Both my husband and I expected to have seen much more of you this autumn; but you can see for yourself what it is in the Highlands—every household is so wrapt up in its own affairs that there is scarcely any time for visiting. If Inverstroy had come to Allt-nam-ba, Inverstroy would have found Allt-nam-ba away shooting on the hill, and *vice versa*; and I suppose that is why old-fashioned people like my father have almost given up the tradition of visiting. When do you go?"

"Well, if we are all packed and ready, I suppose this afternoon ; then we can pass the night at Foyers, and go on to Inverness in the morning."

"But if I had known I could have brought some of the people from the Towers to help you. My father would have been delighted."

She said it without a blush ; perhaps it was only a slip of the tongue.

"Do you think Mrs. Bell would suffer any interference?" said John Shortlands, with a laugh. "I can tell you, my dear Mrs. Graham, that she rules us with a rod of iron—though we're not supposed to know it."

"And how is dear Yolande?" said Mrs. Graham.

"She is very well," Yolande's father said, instantly lowering his eyes, and becoming nervous and fidgety.

"I heard something of what had called her away to the south—at least I presumed that was the reason," continued Mrs. Graham, forcing herself to attack this dangerous topic in order to show that, in her estimation at least, nothing too important had occurred. "Of course one sympathises with her. I hope you have had good news from her?"

"Oh yes," said he, hastily. "Oh yes. I had a letter last night. Yolande is very well."

"Archie," continued Mrs. Graham, thinking enough had been said on that point, "is at Inverness. I declare the way those lawyers fight over trifles is perfectly absurd. And I confess," she added, with a demure smile, "that the owners of deer-forests are not much better. Of course they always tell me I don't know—that it is my ignorance ; but to find people quarrelling about the line the march should take—when an acre of the ground wouldn't give grazing for a sheep—seems stupid enough. Well now, Mr. Winterbourne, may I venture to ask how you found the shooting?"

"Oh, excellent—excellent," said he, brightly, for he also was glad to get away from that other topic. "We have not found as many deer coming about as we expected ; but otherwise the place has turned out everything that could be wished."

"I am glad of that," said she, "for I know Archie had qualms about inducing you to take the shooting. I remember very well, on board ship, he used to think it was a risky thing

—supposing the place had *not* turned out well, then you might have felt that—that——”

“No, no, my dear Mrs. Graham,” said he, with a smile, “*Caveat emptor*. I knew I was taking the place with the usual attending risks; I should not have blamed your brother if we had had a bad year.”

She was just on the point of asking him whether he liked Allt-nam-ba well enough to come back again; but she thought it was too dangerous. She had no means of knowing what he thought of Lord Lynn’s marked unneighbourliness; and she deemed it more prudent to go on talking of general subjects, in her light and cheerful way, and always on the assumption that the two families were on friendly terms, and that Yolande’s future home would be in the Highlands. At length she said she must be going.

“I would ask you to stay to lunch,” said Mr. Winterbourne, “but I daresay you know what lunch is likely to be on the day of leaving a shooting-box——”

“Dear me!” said she, in tones of vexation. “Why did they not think of that at the Towers? They might have saved you a great deal of bother that way; but they have got into an old-fashioned groove there——”

“At the same time, my dear Mrs. Graham,” said Mr. Winterbourne, with great courtesy, “if you like to take the risk, I daresay Mrs. Bell can find you something; and we have not often the chance of entertaining any one at Allt-nam-ba. Will you take pity on us? Will you sit in Yolande’s place? The house has been rather empty since she left.”

“I should like it of all things,” said pretty Mrs. Graham, taking off her hat and gloves and putting them on the sofa, “for I feel that I haven’t given you half the messages I wish you to take to dear Yolande. And you must let me have her address, so that Jim can send her a haunch of venison at Christmas.”

“I am afraid that would not be of much use, thank you,” said he; “for I hope by that time, if all goes well, that Yolande will be away in the south of Europe.”

“Archie is going south also,” said Mrs. Graham, pleasantly. “There is little doing here in the winter. After he has made all the arrangements with papa’s agents in Inverness, then he will be off to the south too. Where is Yolande likely to be?”

“Well, I don’t exactly know,” said Mr. Winterbourne, with a kind of anxious evasion. “But she will write to you. Oh yes, I will tell her to write to you. She is—she is much occupied at present—and—and perhaps she has not much time. But Yolande does not forget her friends.”

“She shall not forget me ; for I won’t let her,” said Mrs. Graham, blithely. “If she should try, I will come and ferret her out and give her a proper scolding. But I don’t think it will be needed.”

The luncheon, frugal as it was, proved to be a very pleasant affair ; for the two men-folk were glad to have the table brightened by the unusual presence of a lady-guest—who was, moreover, very pretty and talkative and cheerful ; while on the other hand, Mrs. Graham, having all her wits about her, very speedily assured herself that Yolande’s father was leaving Allnam-ba in no dudgeon whatever ; and also that, although he seemed to consider Yolande as at present set apart for some special duty, and not to be interfered with by any suggestions of future meetings or arrangements, he appeared to take it for granted that ultimately she would live in the Highlands. Mrs. Graham convinced herself that all was well, and she was a skilful flatterer, and could use her eyes ; and altogether this was a very merry and agreeable luncheon party. Before she finally rose to go, she had got Yolande’s address, and had undertaken to write to her.

And then she pleased Mr. Winterbourne very much by asking to see Mrs. Bell ; and she equally pleased Mrs. Bell by some cleverly turned compliments, and by repeating what the gentlemen had said about their obligations to her. In good truth, Mrs. Bell needed some such comfort. She was sadly broken down. When Mrs. Graham asked her about Mr. Melville, tears rose unbidden to the old dame’s eyes ; and she had furtively to wipe them away with her handkerchief, while pretending to look out of the window.

“He has written two or three times to the young lad Dalrymple,” said she, with just one suppressed sob ; “and all about they brats o’ bairns, as if he wasna in mair consideration in people’s minds than a wheen useless lads and lassies. And only a message or two to me, about this family or the other family—the deil take them, that he should bother his head

about their crofts and their cows and their seed-corn ! And just as he might be having his ain back again—to gang awa' like that, without a word o' an address. I jalouse it's America—ay, I'm thinking it's America, for there they have the electric things he was aye speaking o'; and he was a curious man, that wanted to ken everything. I wonder what the Almichty was about when He put it into people's heads to get fire out o' running water; they might hae been content as they were; and Mr. Melville would hae been better occupit in planting his ain hillsides—as a' the lairds are doing nowadays—than in running frae ae American town to another wi' his boxes o' steel springs and things."

"But he is sure to write to you, Mrs. Bell," said Mrs. Graham.

"I just canna bear to think o't!" said the older woman, in a kind of despair. "I hope he didna leave because he thought I would be an encumbrance on him. I hae mair sense than that. But he's a proud man; though I shouldna say it.—Ay, and the poor lad without a home—and without the land that belongs to him——"

The good old lady found this topic too much for her; and she was retiring with an old-fashioned curtsy, when Mrs. Graham shook hands with her in the most friendly manner, and assured her that, if any tidings of Mr. Melville came to Inverstry (as was almost certain), she would write at once.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LOOSENEED CHAINS.

"*You have done well—you will succeed.*" Yolande read and again read that brief note; pondering over it in secret, and always with an increasing joy. He had seen; he had approved. And now when she was walking about the streets of Worthing with her mother, she found a strange interest in guessing as to which of those houses he had lived in while, as she assured herself, he was keeping that invisible guard over her. Was it this one, or that; or perhaps the hotel at the corner? Had he been standing at the window there, and regarding her as she passed

unconscious? Had he seen her drive by in the little pony-carriage? Had he watched her go along the pier, himself standing somewhere out of the way? She had no longer any doubt that it was he who had gone to the office of Lawrence and Lang on the morning of her arrival in London; she was certain he must have been close by when she went to fetch her mother on that fateful evening. And her heart was full of gratitude to him; and her brain was filled with fancies about him; and her imagination (which refused to be controlled by all the vows and resolves she had made to herself, and which, moreover, had plenty of scope for exercise in the monotony of that Worthing life) went away seeking in strange and distant places, wondering where he might be, and what he was doing, and whether he was ever casting a look behind him.

And indeed, as time went on, it became more and more certain that that forgetfulness to which she had looked forward was still far from her; and now she began to regard with a kind of dismay the prospect of the Master of Lynn coming to claim her. She knew it was her duty to become his wife; that had been arranged and approved by her father; she had herself pledged away her future; and she had no right of appeal. She reminded herself of these facts a hundred times, and argued with herself; she strove to banish those imaginings about one who ought henceforth to be as one dead to her; and strove also to prove to herself that, if she did what was right, unhappiness could not be the result; but all the time there was growing up in her heart a fear—nay, almost a conviction—that this marriage was not possible. She turned away her eyes and would not regard it; but this conviction pressed itself in on her whether she would or no. And then she would engage herself with a desperate assiduity in the trivial details of their daily life there, and try to gain forgetfulness that way.

This was the letter she wrote to the Master of Lynn in reply to his. It cost her some trouble, and also here and there some qualm of self-reproach; for she could not but know that she was not telling the whole truth:—

“Worthing, Wednesday afternoon

“DEAR ARCHIE—I am exceedingly grieved to hear of your trouble with your family, and also to think that I am the cause of

it. It seems so great a pity, and all the more that, in the present circumstances, it is so unnecessary. You will understand from my papa's letter that the duty I have undertaken is surely before any other ; and that one's personal wishes must be put aside, when it is a question of what a daughter owes to her mother. And to think there should be trouble and dissension now over what must in any case be so remote—that seems a very painful and unnecessary thing ; and surely, dear Archie, you can do something to restore yourself to your ordinary position with regard to your family. Do you think it is pleasant to me to think that I am the cause of a quarrel ? And to think also that this quarrel might be continued in the future ? But the future is so uncertain now in these new circumstances that I would pray you not to think of it, but to leave it aside, and become good friends with your family. And how, you may ask ? Well, I would consider our engagement at an end for the present ; let it be as nothing ; you will go back to Lynn ; I am here, in the position that I cannot go from ; let the future have what it may in store, it will be time to consider afterwards. Pray believe me, dear Archie, it is not in anger that I write ; or any resentment ; for I understand well that my papa's politics are not agreeable to every one ; and I have heard of differences in families on smaller matters than that. And I pray you to believe that neither my father nor myself was sensible of any discourtesy—no, surely every one has the right to choose his friends as he pleases ; nor could one expect one's neighbours to alter their habits of living, perhaps, and be at the trouble of entertaining strangers. No, there is neither resentment nor anger in my mind ; but only a wish that you should be reconciled to your friends ; and this is an easy way. It would leave you and me free for the time that might be necessary ; you can go back to Lynn, where your proper place is ; and I can give myself up to my mother, without other thoughts. Will you ask Mrs. Graham if that is not the wisest plan ? I am sure she must be distressed at the thought of your being estranged from your relatives ; and I know she will think it a pity to have so much trouble about what must in any case be so distant. For to tell you the truth, dear Archie, I cannot leave to any one else what I have now undertaken : and it may be years of attention and service that are wanted ; and

why should you wait and wait, and always with the constraint of a family quarrel around you? For myself, I already look at my position that way. I have put aside my engagement-ring. I have given myself over to the one who has most claims on me; and I am proud to think that I may have been of a little service already. Will you consent, dear Archie? then we shall both be free; and the future must be left to itself.

“It was so very kind of you to look after the sending away of the dogs and ponies from Allt-nam-ba; my papa has written to me from Dalescourt about it, and was very grateful to you. No, I will not tell him anything of what is in your letter; for it is not necessary it should be known—especially as I hope you will at once take steps for a reconciliation and think no more of it. And it was very good of your sister to go out and pay them a visit at Allt-nam-ba. I have had a letter from her also—as kind as she always is—asking me to go to Inverstroy at Christmas; but you will understand from what I have said that this is impossible, nor can I make any engagement with any one now, nor have I any desire to do so. I am satisfied to be as I am—also, I rejoice to think that I have the opportunity; I wish for nothing more except to hear that you have agreed to my suggestion and gone back to Lynn. As for my mother and myself, we shall perhaps go to the south of France when she is a little stronger; but at present she is too weak to travel; and happily we find ourselves very well content with this place, now that we are familiar with it, and have found out different ways of passing the time. It is not so wild and beautiful as Allt-nam-ba; but it is a cheerful place for an invalid—we have a pretty balcony, from which we can look at the people on the promenade, and the sea, and the ships; and we have a pony-carriage for the country roads, and have driven almost everywhere in the neighbourhood.

“So now I will say good-bye, dear Archie; and I hope you will consider my proposal, and see that it is wise. What may occur in the future, who can tell?—but in the meantime let us do what is best for those around us; and I think this is the right way. I should feel far happier if I knew that you were not wondering when this service that I owe to my mother

were to end ; and also I should feel far happier to know that I was no longer the cause of disagreement and unhappiness in your family. Give my love to your sister when you see her ; and if you hear anything about the Gress people, I should be glad to hear some news about them also.—Believe me, yours affectionately,

YOLANDE."

She looked at this letter for a long time before putting it in an envelope and addressing it ; and when she posted it, it was with a guilty conscience. So far as it went, she had told the truth. This duty she owed to her mother was paramount ; and she knew not for how long it might be demanded of her. And no doubt she would feel freer and more content in her mind if her engagement were broken off—if she had no longer to fear that he might be becoming impatient over the renewed waiting and waiting. But that was only part of the truth. She could not blind herself to the fact that this letter was very little more than a skilful piece of prevarication ; and this consciousness haunted her, and troubled her, and shamed her. She grew uneasy. Her mother noticed that the girl seemed anxious and distraught, and questioned her ; but Yolande answered evasively. She did not think it worth while to burden her mother's mind with her private disquietudes.

No ; she had not been true to herself ; and she knew it ; and the knowledge brought shame to her cheeks when she was alone. With a conscience ill at ease, the cheerfulness with which she set about her ordinary task of keeping her mother employed and amused was just a little bit forced ; and despite herself she fell into continual reveries—thinking of the arrival of the letter, of his opening it, of his possible conjectures about it. Then, besides these smittings of conscience, there was another thing : would he consider the reason she had advanced for breaking off the engagement as sufficient ? Would he not declare himself willing to wait ? The tone of his letter had been firm enough. He was unmoved by this opposition on the part of his own people ; it was not to gain any release that he had written to her. And now might he not still adhere to his resolution—refusing to make up the quarrel ; resolved to wait Yolande's good pleasure ; and so, in effect, requiring of her the fulfilment of her plighted troth ?

It would be difficult to say which was the stronger motive—the shamed consciousness that she had not spoken honestly, or the ever increasing fear that, after all, she might not be able to free herself from this impossible bond; but at all events she determined to supplement that letter with a franker one. Indeed, she stole out that same evening, under some pretence or other, and went to the post office, and sent off this telegram to him: “*Letter posted to you this afternoon: do not answer it until you get the one following.*” Then she went back to the rooms quickly, her heart somewhat lighter, though, indeed, all during dinner she was puzzling to decide what she should say, and how to make her confession not too humiliating. She did not wish him to think too badly of her. Was it not possible for them to part friends? Or would he be angry, and call her “jilt,” “light o’ love,” and so forth, as she had called herself? Indeed, she had reproached herself enough; anything that he could say would be nothing new to her. Only she hoped—for she had had a gentle kind of regard for him, and he had been mixed up in her imaginings of the future, and they had spent happy days and evenings together, on board ship or in the small lodge between the streams—that they might part friends, without angry words.

“Yolande, there is something troubling you,” her mother said, as they sat at table.

She had been watching the girl in her sad tender way. As soon as she had spoken Yolande instantly pulled herself together.

“Why, yes, there is indeed!” she said. “Shall I tell you what it is, mother? I have been thinking that soon we shall be as tired of pheasants as we were of grouse and hares. Papa sends us far too many; or rather it is Mr. Shortlands now; and I don’t know what to do with them—unless somebody in the town would exchange them. Is it possible? Would not that be an occupation now—to sit in a poulterer’s shop and say, ‘I will give you three brace of pheasants for so many of this and so many of that’?”

“You wrote a long letter this afternoon,” the mother said, absently. “Was it to Mr. Shortlands?”

“Oh no,” Yolande said, with a trifle of colour in her face. “It was to the Master of Lynn. I have often told you about

him, mother. And one thing I quite forgot. I forgot to ask him to inquire of Mrs. Bell where the ballad of 'Young Randal' is to be found—you remember I told you the story? No; there is nothing of it in the stupid book I got yesterday—no, nor any story like it, except, perhaps, one where a Lord Lovat of former times comes home from Palestine and asks for May Maisrey.

*'And bonnier than them a'
May Maisrey, where is she?'*

It is a pretty name, is it not, mother? But I think I must write to Mrs. Bell to send me the words of 'Young Randal,' if it is not to be found in a book."

"I wish you would go away to your friends now, Yolande," the mother said, regarding her in that sad and affectionate way.

"That is so very likely!" she answered, with much cheerfulness.

"You ought to go, Yolande. Why should you remain here? Why should you be shut up here—away from all your friends? You have done what you came for—I feel that now—you need not fear to leave me alone now—to leave me in these same lodgings. I can stay here very well, and amuse myself with books and with looking at the people passing. I should not be dull. I like the rooms. I should find amusement enough."

"And where am I to go, then?" the girl said, calmly.

"To your friends—to all those people you have told me about. That is the proper kind of life for you, at your age—not shut up in lodgings. The lady in the Highlands, for example, who wants you to spend Christmas there——"

"Well, now, dear mother," said Yolande, promptly, "I will not show you another one of my letters if you take the nonsense in them as if it were serious. Christmas, indeed! Why, do you know where we shall be at Christmas? Well, then, at Monte Carlo! No, mother, you need not look forward to the tables; I will not permit any such wickedness—though I have staked more than once—or, rather, papa staked for me—five-franc pieces, and always I won—for as soon as I had won five francs I came away to make sure. But we shall not go to the tables; there is enough without that. There are beautiful drives; and you can walk through the gardens and

down the terraces until you get a boat to go out on the blue water. Then, the other side you take a carriage and drive up to the little town, and by the sea there are more beautiful gardens. And at Monte Carlo I know an excellent hotel, with fine views; and always there is excellent music. And—and you think I am going to spend Christmas in a Highland glen! *Grazie alla bontà sua!*”

“It is too much of a sacrifice. You must leave me to myself—I can do very well by myself now,” the mother said, looking at the girl with wistful eyes. “I should be happy enough only to hear of you. I should like to hear of your being married, Yolande.”

“I am not likely to be married to any one,” said she, with averted eyes and burning forehead. “Do not speak of it, mother. My place is by you; and here I remain—until you turn me away.”

That same night she wrote the letter which was to supplement the former one and free her conscience:—

“DEAR ARCHIE—In the letter I sent you this afternoon I was not quite frank with you; and I cannot rest until I tell you so. There are other reasons besides those I mentioned why I think our engagement should be broken off now; and also—for I wish to be quite honest, and to throw myself on your generosity and forbearance—why I think that we ought not to look forward to the marriage that was thought of. Perhaps you will ask me what these reasons are—and you have the right; and in that case I will tell you. But perhaps you will be kind, and not ask; and I should never forget your kindness. When I promised to marry you, I thought that the friendliness and affection that prevailed between us was enough; I did not imagine anything else; you must think of how I was brought up, with scarcely any women-friends except the ladies at the Château, who were very severe as to the duty of children to their parents, and when I learned that my papa approved my marrying you, it was sufficient for me. But now I think not. I do not think I should bring you happiness. There ought to be no regret on the marriage-day?—no thoughts going away elsewhere? You have the right to be angry with me, because I have been careless, and allowed myself to

become affectionate to some one else without my knowing it ; but it was not with intention ; and now that I know, should I be doing right in allowing our engagement to continue ? Yes, you have the right to upbraid me ; but you cannot think worse of me than I think of myself ; and perhaps it is well that the mistake was soon found out, before harm was done. As for me, my path is clear. All that I said in the other letter as to the immediate future, and I hope the distant future also, is true ; you have only to look at this other explanation to know exactly how I am situated. I welcome my position and its duties—they drive away sometimes sad thinking and regret over what has happened. You were always very kind and considerate to me ; you deserved that I kept my faith to you more strictly ; and if I were to see your sister, what should I say ? Only that I am sorry that I can make no more amends ; and to beg for your forgiveness and for hers. And perhaps it is better as it is for all of us. My way is clear. I must be with my mother. Perhaps, some day, if our engagement had continued, I might have been tempted to repine. I hope not ; but I have no longer such faith in myself. But now you are free from the impatience of waiting ; and I—I go my own way, and am all the more certain to give all my devotion where it is needed. I would pray you not to think too harshly of me, only I know that I have not the right to ask ; and I should like to part friends with you, if only for the sake of the memories that one treasures. My letter is ill-expressed—that I am sure it must be ; but perhaps you will guess at anything I should have said and have not said ; and believe that I could stretch out my hands to you, to beg for your forgiveness, and for gentle thoughts of me in the future, after some years have given us time to look back. I do not think little of any kindness that has been shown to me ; and I shall remember your kindness to me always, and also your sister's, and the kindness of every one, as it seemed to me, whom I met in the Highlands. I have made this confession to you without consulting any one ; for it is a matter only between you and me ; and I do not know how you will receive it ; only that I pray you once more for your forgiveness, and not to think too harshly ; but, if you have such gentleness and commiseration, to let us remain friends and to think of each

other in the future as not altogether strangers. I know it is much that I ask, and that you have the right to refuse ; but I shall look for your letter with the remembrance of your kindness in the past.

YOLANDE."

It was a piteous kind of letter ; for she felt very solitary and unguided in this crisis ; moreover, it was rather hard to fight through this thing and preserve at the same time an appearance of absolute cheerfulness so long as her mother was in the room. But she got it done ; and Jane was sent out to the post office ; and thereafter Yolande—with something of trial and trouble in her eyes, perhaps, but otherwise with a brave face—fetched down some volumes from the little book-case, and asked her mother what she wanted to have read.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE HOUR OF VENGEANCE.

THE Master of Lynn had spent the whole of the morning in arranging affairs with his father's agent ; and when he left Mr. Ronald Macpherson's office he knew that he had now all the world to choose from. He was anxious to get away from this dawdling life in Inverness ; but, on the other hand, he was not going back to Lynn. He still felt angry and indignant ; he considered he had been badly used ; and it is far from improbable that if, at this moment, Yolande had been differently situated, and if Mr. Winterbourne had been likely to have given his consent, he, the Master, would now have proposed an immediate marriage, leaving his father and aunt to do or think as they pleased. But, in the present circumstances, that was impossible ; and he did not know well which way to turn, and had generally got himself into an unsettled, impatient, irritable condition, which boded no good either for himself or for those who had thwarted him.

He returned to the Station Hotel, and was having lunch by himself in the large and almost empty dining-room when two letters were brought to him which had doubtless arrived by that morning's mail. As he was thinking of many things it

did not occur to him to look at both addresses and decide which letter should have precedence ; he mechanically opened and read the first that came to hand :—

“St. James’s Club, Piccadilly, Oct. 31.

“DEAR LESLIE—Are you game for a cruise? I will go where you like, and start any day you like. I have never taken the *Juliet* across the Atlantic—what do you say? The worst of it is, there aint much to see when you get there ; but we should have some fun going over and coming back. Drop me a line. She is at Plymouth, and could be got ready in a week.—Yours ever,
DARTOWN.”

Now to have a 300-ton steam yacht put at your disposal is an agreeable kind of thing ; but there were other circumstances in this case. Lord Dartown was a young Irish peer who had inherited an illustrious name, large estates (fortunately for him, some of them were in England), and a sufficiency of good looks ; but who, on the other hand, seemed determined to bid a speedy farewell to all of these by means of incessant drinking. His friends regarded him with much interest ; for he was doing it on dry champagne ; and as that is a most unusual circumstance—champagne being somewhat too much of child’s play for the serious drinker—they looked on and wondered how long it would last, and repeated incredible stories as to the number of bottles this youth could consume from the moment of his awaking in his berth until his falling asleep in the same. The *Juliet* was an exceedingly well-appointed vessel ; the cook had a reputation that a poet might envy ; but the habits of the owner were peculiar, and most frequently he had to make his cruises alone. But he had always had a great respect for the Master of Lynn, who was his senior by a year or two, when they were schoolfellows together ; and sometimes in later years a kind of involuntary admiration for the firm nerve and hardened frame of his deer-stalking friend would lead to a temporary fit of reformation, and he would even take to practising with dumb-bells, which his trembling muscles could scarcely hold out at arm’s length.

“Owley must be off his head altogether this time,” the Master of Lynn coolly said to himself, as he regarded the shaky handwriting of the letter. “To think of facing the

‘rolling forties’ at this time of year! We should die of cold besides. Not good enough, Owley; you must throw a fly over somebody else.”

So he put that letter aside, and took up the other. It was the second one of the two that Yolande had sent him; he had got its predecessor on the previous day. And now, as he read this final declaration and confession, it was with an ever-increasing surprise; but it certainly was with no sense of dismay, or disappointment, or even the resentment of wounded vanity. He did not even, at this moment, heed the piteous appeal for charity and kindness; it was not of her he was thinking; and scarcely of himself; it was rather of the people at Lynn.

“Now I will show them what they have done!” he was saying to himself, with a kind of triumph. “They shall see what they have done. And I hope they will be satisfied. As for me, I am going my own way after this. I have had enough of it. Polly may scheme as she likes; and they may rage, or refuse, or go to the deuce, if they like; I am going to look after myself now.”

He picked up the other letter, and took both with him into the writing-room; he had forgotten that he had left his luncheon but half finished. And there he read Yolande’s appeal to him with more care; and he was touched by the penitence and the simplicity, and the eager wish for friendliness in it; and he determined, as he sat down at the writing-table, that, as far as he had command of the English language, she should have safe assurance that they were to part on kindly terms. Indeed, as it turned out, this was the most affectionate letter he had ever sent her; and it might have been said of him, with regard to this engagement, that nothing in it so well became him as his manner of leaving it.

“MY DEAREST YOLANDE,” he wrote, “I am inexpressibly grieved that you should have given yourself the pain to write such a letter; and you might have known that whenever you wished our engagement to cease I should consider you had the right to say so; and so far from accusing you or doing anything in the tragedy line, I should beg to be allowed to remain always your friend. And it won’t take any length of time for me to be on quite friendly terms with you—if you will let me;

for I am so now ; and if I saw you to-morrow I should be glad of your companionship for as long as you chose to give it me ; and I don't at all think it impossible that we may have many another stroll along the streets of Inverness, when you come back to the Highlands, as you are sure to do. Of course, I am quite sensible of what I have lost—you can't expect me to be otherwise ; and I daresay, if all the circumstances had been propitious, and if we had married, we should have got on very well together—for when Polly attributes everything that happens to my temper, that is merely because she is in the wrong, and can't find any other excuse ; whereas, if you and I had got married, I fancy we should have agreed very well, so long as no one interfered. But to tell you the honest truth, my dear Yolande, I never did think you were very anxious about it ; you seemed to regard our engagement as a very light matter—or as something that would please everybody all round ; and though I trusted that the future would right all that—I mean that we should become more intimate and affectionate—still, there would have been a risk ; and it is only common sense to regard these things now, as some consolation, and as some reason why, if you say, 'Let us break off this engagement,' I should say, 'Very well ; but let us continue our friendship.'

"But there is a tremendous favour I would beg and entreat of you, dearest Yolande ; and you always had the most generous disposition—I never knew you refuse anybody anything (I do believe that was why you got engaged to me—because you thought it would please the Grahams and all the rest of us). I do hope that you will consent to keep the people at Lynn in ignorance—they could only know through Polly, and you could keep it back from her—as to who it was, or why it was, that our engagement was broken off. This is not from vanity ; I think you will say I haven't shown much of that sort of distemper. It is merely that I may have the whip-hand of the Lynn people. They have used me badly ; and I mean to take care that they don't serve me so again ; and if they imagine that our engagement has been broken off solely, or even partly, through their opposition, that will be a weapon for me in the future. And then the grounds of their opposition—that they or their friends might have to associate with one professing such opinions as those your father owns ! You may

rest assured, dearest Yolande, that I did not put you forward and make any appeal ; and equally I knew you would resent my making any apology for your father, or allowing that any consideration on their part was demanded. It's no use reasoning with raving maniacs ; I retired. But I mention this once more as an additional reason why, if our engagement is to be broken off, we should make up our minds to look on the best side of affairs, and to part on the best of terms ; for I must confess more frankly to you now that there would have been some annoyance, and you would naturally have been angry on account of your father, and I should have taken your side, and there would simply have been a series of elegant family squabbles.

"There are one or two other points in your letter that I don't touch on ; except to say that I hope you will write to me again—and *soon* ; and that you will write in a very different tone. I hope you will see that many things justify you in so doing ; and I hope I have made this letter as plain as can be. I have kept back nothing ; so you needn't be reading between the lines. If you have no time to write a letter, send me a few words to show that you are in a more cheerful mood. If you don't, I shouldn't wonder if I broke through all social observances, and presented myself at your door—to convince you that you have done quite right, and that everything is well, and that you have given me a capital means of having it out with the Lynn people when the proper time comes. So please let me have a few lines ; and in the meantime I hope I may be allowed to sign myself, yours most affectionately,

A. LESLIE."

"*P.S.*—Do you remember my telling you of the small youth who was my fag—the cheeky young party who was always smuggling champagne and pastry ? I may have told you that he is now the owner of a 300-ton yacht ? Well, he wants me to go a cruise with him. I had not intended doing so ; but it occurs to me that I might do worse—as all my affairs are settled up here ; and so, if you can write within the next few days, will you please address to me at the——Hotel, Jermyn Street ?"

Then he wrote :—

“Inverness, Oct. 31.

“DEAR OWLEY—It isn’t a *compagnon de voyage* you want ; it’s a straight waistcoat. You would knock the *Juliet* all to bits if you took her across now ; and a fine thing to choose winter for a visit to New York, where the weather is cold enough to freeze the ears off a brass monkey. This letter will reach London same time as myself ; so you can look me up at —— Hotel, Jermyn Street ; and I’ll talk to you like a father about it. My notion is you should send the *Juliet* to Gib., and we could make our way down through Spain ; or, if that is too tedious for your lordship, send her to Marseilles, and then we could fill up the intervening time in Paris. I have never been to Venice in a yacht, and don’t remember whether you can get near enough to Danieli’s to make it handy ; but I suppose, even if you have to lie down by the Giudecca, there would be no difficulty about getting people to a dance on board ? I’ll see you through it.—Yours,
A. LESLIE.”

And then (for now the hour of vengeance had struck) he wrote as follows to his sister :—

“Station Hotel, Oct. 31.

“DEAR POLLY—I have to inform you, and I hope you will convey the information to his Papa-ship and to Auntie Tab, that my engagement to Yolande Winterbourne is finally, definitely, and irrevocably broken off. I hope they will be satisfied. I shall be more careful another time to keep the affair in my own hands.

“I am off for a cruise with Dartown, in the *Juliet*. Guess there’ll be about as much fluid inside as outside that noble craft.—Your affectionate brother,
ARCHIE.”

And then, having folded up and addressed his letters, he rose and went outside and lit a cigar. He thought he would have a stroll away through the town and out by the harbour, just to think over this that had occurred, and what was likely to occur in the future. It happened to be a very bright and cheerful afternoon, and he walked quickly, with a sort of glad consciousness that now he was master of his own destiny, and meant to remain so ; and when he came in sight of the ruffled and windy blue sea, that had suggestions of voyaging and the

seeing of strange places that were pleasant enough. Then his cigar drew well; and that, although it may be unconsciously, tells on a man's mood. He began to be rather grateful to Yolande. He hoped she would quite understand his letter, and answer it in the old familiar, affectionate way, just as if nothing had occurred. It distressed him to think she should be in such grief—in such penitence. But he knew he should get some cheerful lines from her; and that, and all, was well.

By and by, however, a very uncomfortable suspicion got hold of him. He had had no very large experience of women and their ways; and he began to ask himself whether the ready acquiescence he had yielded to Yolande's prayer would please her over much. It certainly was not flattering to her vanity. For one thing, he could not wholly explain his position to her. He could not tell her that he had virtually said to his father, "Here is a way of getting back Corrievreak; and getting the whole estate into proper condition. You refuse? Very well; you mayn't get another chance, remember." He could not fully explain to her why her proposal, instead of bringing him disappointment, was rather welcome, as offering him a means of vengeance for the annoyance he had been subjected to. She knew nothing of Shena Ván. She knew nothing of the proposal to complete the Lynn deer-forest. And so he began to think that his letter, breaking off the engagement so very willingly, might not wholly please her; and as he was well disposed towards Yolande at this moment, and honestly desiring that they should part the best of friends, he slowly walked back to the hotel, composing a few more sentences by the way, so that her womanly pride should not be wounded.

But it was a difficult matter. He went upstairs to his room, and packed his things for the journey to London, while thinking over what he would say to her. And it was very near dinner-time before he had finished this addendum to his previous letter.

"MY DEAREST YOLANDE," he wrote, "I want to say something more to you; if you get the two letters together, read this one second. Perhaps you may think, from what I said in the other, that I did not sufficiently value the prospect that was before me at one time, or else I should say something

more about losing it. I am afraid you may think I have given you up too easily and lightly; but you would make a great mistake if you think I don't know what I have lost. Only I did not want to make it too grave a matter; your letter was very serious; and I wanted you to think, and I want you to think, that there is no reason why we should not continue on quite friendly and intimate terms. Of course, I know what I have lost; I wasn't so long in your society—on board ship, and in the dahabeeah, too, and at Allt-nam-ba—without seeing how generous you were, and sincere, and anxious to make every one around you happy; and if it comes to that, and if you will let me say it, a man naturally looks forward with some pride to having always with him a wife who can hold her own with everybody in regard to personal appearance, and grace and finish of manner, and accomplishments. Of course I know what I have lost. I am not blind. I always looked forward to seeing you and Polly together at the ball at the Northern Meeting. But when you say it is impossible, and seem put out about it, naturally I tried to find out reasons for looking at the best side of the matter. It is the wisest way. When you miss a bird it is of no use saying, 'Confound it, I have missed;' it is much better to say, 'Thank goodness I didn't go near it; it won't go away wounded.' And quite apart from anything you said in your letter of to-day, there was enough in your letter of yesterday to warrant us both in consenting to break off the engagement. Circumstances were against it, on both sides. Of course I would have gone on—as I wrote to you. A man can't be such a cur as to break his word to his promised wife simply because his relatives are ill-tempered—at least, if I came across such a gentleman he wouldn't very long be any acquaintance of mine. But there would have been trouble and family squabbles, as I say, if not a complete family separation—which could not be pleasant to a young wife; and then, on your side, there is this duty to your mother, which was not contemplated when we were engaged; and so, when we consider everything, perhaps it is better as it is. I daresay, if we had married, we should have been as contented as most people; and I should have been very proud of you as my wife, naturally; but it is no use speculating on what might have been. It is very fortunate, when an engagement is

broken off, if not a particle of blame attaches to either side ; and in that way we should consider ourselves lucky, as giving no handle for any ill-natured gossip.

“Of course, Polly will be cut up about it. She always had an extraordinary affection for you, and looked forward to your being her sister. Graham will be disappointed too ; you were always *very highly valued* in that quarter. But if you and I are of one mind that the decision we have come to is a wise one, it is our business, and no one else’s.”

He stopped and read over again those last sentences.

“I consider now,” he was saying to himself, “that that is a friendly touch—No blame attaching to either side : that will please her ; she was always very sensitive, and pleased to be thought well of.”

“And even,” he continued, “if I should get reconciled to my people (about which I am in no hurry), Lynn will seem a lonely place after this autumn ; and I suppose I shall conceive a profound detestation for next year’s tenant of Allt-nam-ba. Probably two or three bachelor fellows will have the lodge ; and it will be pipes and brandy and soda and limited loo in the evening ; they won’t know that there was once a fairy living in that glen. But I don’t despair of seeing you again in the Highlands, and your father too ; and, as they say the subject of deer-forests is to be brought before the House, he will now be in a position to talk a little common sense to them about that subject. Did you see that the chief agitator on this matter has just been caught speaking about the grouse and red-deer of Iona ? Now I will undertake to eat all the red-deer and all the grouse he can find in Iona at one meal ; and I’ll give him three months for the search.”

He thought this was very cleverly introduced. It was to give her the impression that they could now write to each other indifferently on the subjects of the day—in short, that they were on terms of ordinary and pleasant friendship.

“But I daresay you will consider me prejudiced—for I have been brought up from my infancy almost with a rifle in my hand ; and so I will end this scrawl, again asking from you a few lines just to show that we are friends as before, and as I hope we shall ever remain.—Yours most affectionately

ARCHIE LESLIE.”

It was a clever letter, he considered. The little touches of flattery ; the business-like references to the topics of the day ; the frank appeals to her old friendship—these would not be in vain. And so he went into his dinner with a light heart, and the same night went comfortably to sleep in a saloon-carriage bound for London.

CHAPTER XLV.

A PERILOUS SITUATION.

THE Master of Lynn, however, was not destined to get to London without an adventure—an adventure, moreover, that was very near ending seriously. Most people who have travelled in the north will remember that the night train from Inverness stops for a considerable time, in the morning, at Perth before setting out again for the south ; and this break in the journey is welcome enough to passengers who wish to have the stains of travel washed from their hands and faces, to get their breakfast in peace and comfort, and have their choice of the morning newspapers. The Master of Lynn had accomplished these various duties ; and now he was idly walking up and down the stone platforms of the wide-resounding station, smoking a cigarette. He was in a contented frame of mind. There had been too much trouble of late up there in the north ; and he hated trouble ; and he thought he would find the society of “Owley ” very tolerable, for “Owley ” would leave him alone. He finished his cigarette ; had another look at the book-stall ; purchased a two-shilling novel that promised something fine—for there was a picture outside of a horse coming to awful grief at a steeplechase, and its rider going through the air like a cannon-ball ; and then he strolled back to the compartment he had left, vacantly whistling the while *The Hills of Lynn*.

Suddenly he was startled to find a well-known face regarding him. It was Shena Ván, and she was seated in a corner of a second-class carriage. The moment she saw that he had noticed her, she averted her eyes, and pretended not to have seen him ; but he instantly went to the door of the carriage.

"It isn't possible you are going to London, Miss Stewart?" said he, in great surprise.

"Oh no," said Shena Vân. "I am not going so far as that."

"How far, then?" he asked—for he saw that she was embarrassed, and only wishing to get rid of him, and certainly that she would afford no information that wasn't asked for.

"I am going to Carlisle," said she, not looking at him.

"And alone?"

"Oh yes. But my brother's friends will be waiting for me at the station."

"Oh, you must let me accompany you, though," said he, quickly. "You won't mind?"

He did not give her the chance of refusing; for he had little enough time in which to fetch his things along from the other carriage. Then he had to call the news-boy, and present to Miss Stewart such an assortment of illustrated papers, comic journals, and magazines, as might have served for a voyage to Australia. And then the door was shut; the whistle shrieked; and the long, heavy train moved slowly out of the station.

"Well, now," said he, "this is lucky! Who could have expected it? I did not see you at the station last night."

She had seen him, however; though she did not say so.

"I did not even know you were in Inverness; I thought you were at Aberdeen."

"I have been in Aberdeen," said she. "I only went back a day or two ago to get ready for going south."

"I suppose I mustn't ask you what is taking you to Carlisle?—and yet, we used to be old friends, you know."

Now Miss Stewart was a little bit annoyed at his thrusting himself on her society; and she was very near answering saucily that it was the train that was taking her south; but a little touch of feminine vanity saved him from that reproof. Shena Vân was rather glad to have the chance of telling him why she was going south.

"It is no great secret," said she. "I am going to stay with the family of the young lady whom my brother will marry before long. It appears that the professorship will be worth a good deal more than we expected—oh yes, indeed, a good deal more—and there is no reason why he should not marry."

"Well, that is good news," said the Master, cheerfully. "And what sort of girl is she? Nice?"

"She is a very well-accomplished young lady," said Shena Vên, with some dignity. "She was two years in Germany at school and two years in France, and she is very well fitted to be a professor's wife, and for the society that comes to my brother's house."

"I hope she's good-looking?"

"As to that," said Miss Stewart, "I should say she was very pretty indeed; but that is of no consequence nowadays."

"Why, what else is?" he exclaimed, boldly.

But this was clearly dangerous ground; and Miss Stewart sought refuge in the pages of *Punch*.

He had time to regard her. He had never seen her look so well. She had made ample use of the clear water supplied at Perth station; and her face was as fresh as the morning; while her pretty, soft, light-brown hair was carefully brushed and tended. As for her eyes—those strangely dark-blue eyes that he could remember in former years brimming over with girlish merriment or grown pensive with imaginative dreams—he could not get a fair glimpse of them at all; for when she spoke she kept them averted or turned down; and at present she devoted them to the study of *Punch*. He began to regret those extensive purchases at the station. He made sure she was at this moment poring over Mr. du Maurier's drawings—for it is to them that women-folk instinctively turn first; and he grew to be jealous of Mr. du Maurier, and to wish, indeed, that Mr. du Maurier had never been born—a wish, one may be certain, then formulated for the first and only time by any inhabitant of these three countries. Moreover, when she had finished with *Punch*, she took up this magazine, and that magazine, and this journal and that journal; the while answering his repeated attempts at conversation in a very distant and reserved way, and clearly intimating that she wished to be allowed to prosecute her studies. He hated the sight of those pages. He was ready to devote the whole periodical literature of his country to the infernal gods. Why, look now, on this beautiful, shining morning, how she ought to be admiring those far-stretching Ochils and the distant Braes of Doune! Here were the wooded banks of Allan Water—had these no romantic

associations for her, no memories of broken-hearted lovers and sad stories and the like? Had she no eye for the wide, open strath they were now entering, with the silver winding Links of Forth coming nearer and nearer, and a pale blue smoke rising afar over the high walls and ramparts of Stirling town? He verily believed that, just to keep away from him, and fix her attention on something, she was capable of reading Parliamentary Debates—the last resort of the vacant mind.

But once they were away from Stirling again, he determined at all hazards to startle her out of this distressing seclusion.

“Shena,” said he, “do I look ill?”

She glanced up, frightened.

“No.”

“I ought to look ill—I ought to look unhappy and miserable,” said he, cheerfully. “Don’t you know that I have been jilted?”

Well, she did not quite know what to say to that. He looked as if he was joking; and yet it was not a thing he was likely to mention in joke—and to her.

“It is quite true, I assure you,” said he, seeing that she did not make answer. “You said you had heard I was going to be married. Well, it’s all broken off.”

“I am very sorry,” said Shena Ván, as in duty bound; but she was clearly not very sure as to how to take the news.

“Oh please don’t waste any pity on me,” said he. “I don’t feel very miserable. I feel rather the other way. ‘Ah, freedom is a noble thing’—you remember how Barbour used to puzzle you, Shena? Yes, I am free now to follow out my own wishes; and that’s what I mean to do.”

“You are going to live in London, perhaps?” said Miss Stewart, regarding him—but not betraying any keen personal interest.

“Why, this is the point of it,” said he, with greater animation, for at last she had deigned to lay down the newspaper, “that I don’t in the least know where I am going, and don’t much care. I have determined to be my own master, since my folk at home appeared disinclined to accept the programme I had sketched out. Absolutely my own master; and now, if you, Shena, would tell me something very fine and pleasant for me to do, that would be a kindness.”

"In the meantime," said she, with a slight smile, "I wish you would call me by my right name."

"Do you think I can forget the days when you were always 'Shena'?" said he, with a sort of appealing glance that her eyes were careful to avoid. "Don't you remember when I brought you the white kitten from Inverness, and how it was always pulling its collar of daisies to pieces? Don't you remember my getting you the falcon's wings? Why, I had to lie all night among the rocks on Carn-nan-Gael to get at that falcon. And you were always 'Shena' then."

"Because I was a child," said Miss Stewart, with a slight flush on the pretty fresh-coloured face. "When we grow up, we put aside childish things."

"But we can't always forget," said he.

"Indeed, it seems easy enough to many," she answered, but with no apparent sarcasm or intention. "And you have not fixed where you are going, Mr. Leslie?" she added, with a certain formality.

"At the present moment, to tell you the truth," said he, "I have half made an engagement to go away on a yachting cruise with a young fellow I know. But he is rather an ass. I am not looking forward to it with any great pleasure. Ah! I could imagine another kind of trip."

She did not ask him what it was. She seemed more inclined to turn over the title-pages of the magazines.

"I can imagine two young people who are fond of each other being able to go away by themselves on a ramble through Italy—perhaps two young people who had been separated, and meeting after a time, and inclined to take their lives into their own hands and do with them what seemed best—leaving friends and other considerations aside altogether. And they might have old times to talk about as they sat at dinner—by themselves—in a room at this or that hotel—perhaps overlooking the Rhine, it may be, if they were still in Germany; or perhaps overlooking the Arno, if they were in Florence. Fancy having only the one companion with you, to go through the galleries, and see all the pictures; and to go to the opera with you in the evening—just the one and only companion you would care to have with you. Wouldn't that be a trip?"

"I daresay," replied Miss Stewart, coldly. "But the two people would have to be pretty much of one mind."

"I am supposing they are fond of each other," said he, looking at her; but she would not meet his glance.

"I suppose it sometimes happens," said she, taking up one of the magazines, so that he was forced to seek refuge in a comic journal, greatly against his will.

By and by they were hurling onward through the solitudes where the youthful Clyde draws its waters from the burns that trickle and tumble down the slopes of "Tintock Tap." He thought it was not kind of Shena Vân to hide herself away like that. Her imagination would not warm to any picture he could draw—though that of their being together in a Florentine gallery seemed to him rather captivating. Perhaps she was offended at his having neglected her for such a long time? But she was a sensible young woman; she must have understood the reasons. And now had he not intimated to her that he was no longer inclined to submit to the influence of his friends? But she did not betray any interest or curiosity.

"I wonder whether we stop at Beattock Junction," said he.

"I am sure I don't know," she answered, civilly.

"Has it occurred to you, Shena," said he, with a peculiar sort of smile, "that if any one who knew both of us happened to be at one of those stations, they might make a curious surmise about us?"

"I do not understand you," Miss Stewart observed.

"Did you ever hear of Allison's Bank Toll-house?" he asked.

"No."

"That was where they made the Gretna Green marriages—it is just on this side the Border. I think it is rather a pity the Gretna Green marriages were done away with; it was an effectual way of telling your friends to mind their own business. There was no trouble about it. But it is just about as easy now, if you don't mind paying for a Special License; and I do believe it is the best way. Your friends can get reconciled to it afterwards if they like; if they don't like, they can do the other thing. That was what I was thinking, Shena—if some of our friends were to see us in this carriage, it wouldn't surprise me if they imagined we were on a venture of that kind."

Shena Vân blushed deeply, and was ashamed of her embarrassment ; and said with some touch of anger—

“They could not think of such nonsense !”

“It’s the sensible plan, though, after all,” said he, pertinaciously—and yet appearing to treat the subject as a matter of speculation. “Jock o’ Hazledean, Young Lochinvar, Ronald Macdonald, and the rest of them, why they said—‘Oh hang it, let’s have no more bother about your friends ; if you are willing to chance it, so am I ; let’s make a bolt of it, and they can have their howl when they find out.’ And it answered well enough, according to all accounts. I rather think there was a row about Bonny Glenlyon ; but then the noble sportsman who carried her off carried her off against her will ; and that is a mistake. It’s ‘Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?’ and if you can persuade her, she ‘Kilts up her coats o’ green satin’ and you lift her into the saddle ; but if she doesn’t see it—if she thinks it isn’t good enough—you drop the subject.”

“You seem to have been reading a good many songs,” said Shena Vân, rather coldly. “But people don’t go on in that way in ordinary life.”

“Perhaps it might be better if they did occasionally,” said he. “You remember Jack Melville, of course ?”

“Oh, certainly,” said she, with some eagerness, for she thought he would now leave that other perilous topic.

“Well, I remember one night, in my rooms, when we were at Oxford together, he propounded the theory that morality is merely a system of laws devised by the aged and worn-out for keeping young people straight. Of course, it was only a joke ; but it startled the boys a bit. And although it was only a joke, mind you, there was something in it ; I mean, for example, that it doesn’t follow, because you’re seventy, you know what is best for a person of five-and-twenty. You may know what is most prudent, from the money point of view ; but you don’t necessarily know what is best. You look with different eyes. And there is a great deal too much of that going on nowadays.”

“Of what ?” she asked, innocently.

“Oh, of treating life as if everything were a question of money,” replied this profound philosopher—who had for the moment forgotten all about Corrievreak in his anxiety to get a peep at Shena Vân’s unfathomable blue eyes.

Miss Stewart now returned to one of those inhuman periodicals ; and he searched his wits in vain for some subject that would draw her thence. Moreover, he began to think that this train was going at a merciless speed. They smashed through Lockerbie. They had scarcely a glimpse of Ecclefechan. Kirtlebridge went by like a flash of lightning. And then he recollected that very soon they would be at Gretna Green.

"Shena," said he, eagerly. "Shena, have you been as far south as this before?"

"Oh no," she answered. "I have never been farther south than Edinburgh and Glasgow. But Mary Vincent is to be at the station waiting for me."

"I did not mean that. Don't you know that soon you will be at Gretna? Don't you know you will soon be crossing the Border? Why, you should be interested in that! It is your first entrance into England. Shall I tell you the moment you are in England?"

"Oh yes, if you please," said Miss Stewart, condescending to look out and regard the not very picturesque features of the surrounding scenery.

"Well, you be ready to see a lot of things at once ; for I don't know whether you actually see Gretna Green church ; but I will show you the little stream that divides the two countries—that was the stream the runaway lovers were so anxious to get over. I am told they have extraordinary stories in Gretna about the adventures of those days—I wonder nobody goes and picks them up. They had some fun in those days. I wish I had lived then. Modern life is too monotonous—don't you think so?"

"I don't know," said Shena Vân, honestly.

"I mean I wish I had lived in those days if I had had the chance of running away with somebody that made it worth the risk. Shena," said he, "supposing you had lived at that time, don't you think you would rather have had the excitement of that kind of wedding than the ordinary humdrum sort of affair?"

"I have never thought anything about it," said Miss Stewart, with some precision—as if any properly-conducted young woman would give a moment's consideration to the manner in which she might wish to be married!

"Look, look," said he, jumping up, and involuntarily putting his hand on her arm. "Look, Shena! The village is over there—here is the river, see!—it is the Sark—and the bridge is down there, to the left of that house—that house is an inn, the last in England on the old coach-road——"

She took away her arm.

"Ah," said he, as he sat down, "many a happy couple were glad to find their great big George the Fourth phaeton clattering over the bridge there—the triumph after all the risk——"

Then he reflected that in a few minutes' time they would be in Carlisle; and this made him rather desperate; for when again should he see Shena Vân—and Shena Vân alone?

"Can you imagine yourself living at that time, Shena; and if I were to ask you to make off for Gretna with me and get married, what would you say?"

"You—you have no right to ask me such a question," said Shena Vân, rather breathlessly.

"There would have been no chance of your saying 'yes'?" he asked, gently.

"I don't know what you mean," said she; and she was nervously twisting the magazine in her hand. "I—I think you are forgetting. You are forgetting who you are—who I am—and everything that—that once happened—I mean, that nothing happened—for how could it? And to ask such a question—even in joke—well, I think you have no right to ask me such a question; and the absurdity of it is enough answer."

"I did not mean it as a joke at all, Shena," said he, quite humbly—and yet trying to catch sight of her eyes. "I asked you if you could imagine other circumstances—other circumstances in which I might ask you such a question—of course, I am very sorry if I have offended you——"

"I think there has been enough said," said Miss Stewart, quietly, and, indeed, with a good deal of natural dignity.

Just before they were going into Carlisle station, she said—

"I hope, Mr. Leslie, you won't misunderstand me; but—but, of course, Miss Vincent and her friends won't know who you are; and I would rather they did not know. There is always silly talk going on; it begins in amusement; and then people repeat it and believe it."

"I shall be quite a stranger to you when we get into the

station," said he. "And in the meantime I will say good-bye to you; and you must tell me that we part good friends; although you do seem to care so little about those bygone days, Shena."

"Good-bye," said she, holding out her hand (but with her eyes cast down). "And perhaps I care for them as much as I ought; but one acquires a little common sense as one grows up. I hope you will have a pleasant trip in the yacht, Mr. Leslie."

At the station he got out first and assisted her to alight; then he got a porter for her; and raised his hat to her with the air of a perfect stranger as she disappeared with her friends. Then he had his own things shifted into a first-class smoking compartment; and the journey was resumed.

It was a lonely journey. There was something wrong. He already hated the *Juliet*; and looked forward with disgust to being thrown on the society of a brainless young idiot. Nay, this was the matter; why had he not asked Janet Stewart plump and plain? Why had he not asked her to stop at Carstairs Junction, and go back with him to Edinburgh or Glasgow, where he could easily have found friends to take care of her until the special license had been obtained? Why had he not dared his fate? Sometimes women were captured by the very suddenness of the proposal.

"And as for the people at Lynn," he was saying to himself during these perturbed meditations, "why, then they might have had some good occasion to squawk! They might have squawked to some purpose then! But I missed my chance—if ever there was one; and now it is this accursed yacht and that insufferable young nincompoop!"

Things did not look altogether serene for the Right Honourable the Lord Dartown of Dartown, Co. Limerick, and Ashwood Manor, Berks.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A SPY.

It is quite impossible to describe the gladness and gratitude with which Yolande read the letter from the Master of Lynn, which not only gave her her freedom, but said good-bye in such a

friendly fashion. For once a ray of sunlight fell on a life which, of late, had not been of the brightest.

"Yolande, what is the matter? You have had good news this morning?" said the mother, coming into the room, and noticing the radiant face of the girl.

"Yes, indeed, mother—the best I have had for many a day!" said she, and she led her mother to the window, and put her in the easy-chair, and patted her shoulder affectionately. "The best news I have had for many a day."

"What is it? May I ask?"

For an instant Yolande hesitated; then she laughed, and put the letter in her pocket.

"No; it would be too long to explain. But shortly I will tell you what it is, mother—why, only that one of the friends I know in the Highlands has been generous and kind to me. Is it a wonderful thing? Is it new—unexpected?"

"Ah, you ought to be with them, Yolande: not here, throwing away your time on me."

"Ridiculous—ridiculous!" said she, in her French way; and then with a light step and a bright face she went off to get writing materials.

"DEAR ARCHIE," she wrote,—*"It is so good of you. I do not deserve it. You have made me very happy; and I hope you also will soon be reconciled at home, and everything go well. It is a great pleasure you offer me that we should always continue friends, and I hope it will be so; I know it will on my side; and one may be in Inverness some day, perhaps—then I should be pleased to see you again, and also your sister, and Colonel Graham. But that will be a long time if at all; for my mother, though she is much better, does not get strong as I wish, and naturally I remain with her—perhaps for always. How could I leave her? But if once she were strong enough to travel, then one might perhaps see one's friends, in the Highlands or elsewhere; and in the meantime it is consolation to know that they remain your friends, and think of you occasionally. Dear Archie, you are really too kind to me, and too flattering also, but you cannot expect a woman to fight very hard against that, so I am glad you will have as generous an opinion of me as is possible, even*

if it is exaggerated, and perhaps not quite true. I remember your speaking of your school-fellow very well—is he the most favourable of companions for a yachting-voyage? I suppose you are going south; for now the days are becoming cold; and we are thinking of going away to the south also. How strange it would be if my mother and I were to be seated on one of the terraces at Monte Carlo and you were to come sailing into the harbour below us. You must tell me the name of the yacht; and when we are at Nice or Cannes, or such places, I will look in the newspapers for the lists, and perhaps hear of you.

“This is all I can write to you at the moment, but you must believe me that it does not convey to you anything like what I feel. You will excuse me—perhaps you will understand. But I will not forget your kindness.—Your grateful

“YOLANDE.”

“P.S.—I will do as you wish about not stating any reasons; though I am afraid that is only another part of your consideration and generosity in disguise.”

She went to get her hat and cloak.

*“Tais-toi, mon gas,
Et ne ris pas
Tout va de mal en pire,”*

she was humming to herself, most inappropriately, as she put them on. And then she went back to her mother.

“Will you get ready, mother? I have a letter to post. And I want to see if they can get me as much more of that fur as will make a hood for your travelling-cloak—ah, you have no idea how comfortable it is if the weather is cold and you are on a long railway journey.”

“Why, you spoil me, Yolande—you make a petted child of me,” the mother protested.

“Come, get on your things,” said she, not heeding. “And perhaps, when we are seeking for the fur, I might get a winter-cloak for Jane. Does she not deserve a little present? She has been very attentive—has she not, do you think?”

“When she has had the chance, Yolande,” the mother said, with a smile. “But you do everything yourself, child.”

The alteration in the girl’s manner after the receipt of that

letter was most marked. Gladness dwelt in her eyes, and spoke in her voice. She grew so hopeful, too, about her mother's health, that now, when they went out for a morning stroll among the shops, she would buy this or the other small article likely to be of use to them in travelling. That was partly why she presented Jane with that winter-cloak; Jane was to be their sole attendant. And now all her talk was about orange-groves and palms, and marble terraces shaded from the sun, and the summer-blue waters of the south.

But there was one person who certainly did not regard the breaking off of this engagement with equanimity. Immediately on receiving the brief note sent from the Station Hotel at Inverness, Mrs. Graham, astonished and indignant and angry, posted over straightway to Lynn, and told her tale, and demanded explanations. Well, they had no explanations to offer. If it were true, Lord Lynn said indifferently, it was a very good thing; but he did not choose to bother his head about it. Then pretty Mrs. Graham had a few words, verging on warmth, with her Aunt Colquhoun; but she quickly saw that that would not mend matters. Thereupon she thought she would appeal to Yolande herself; and she did so—dating the letter from Lynn Towers.

"MY DEAR YOLANDE," she said,—*"Is it true? Or has Archie been making a fool of us? Of course, he is off without a word of explanation; and I cannot imagine it possible that his and your engagement should have been so suddenly broken off, and without any apparent cause. Forgive me for interfering, dearest Yolande; I know it is no concern of mine—except in so far as this goes—that Archie is my brother, and I have a right to know whether he acted as he should have done, and as becomes the honour of our family. I have a right to know that. At the same time it seems incredible that you and he should have parted—and so suddenly—without any warning; for although there were some disagreement here, as he probably hinted to you, still, that could have nothing to do with him and you ultimately, and he distinctly informed me that his position with regard to you was not affected, and would not be affected, by anything happening here. I hope I am not giving you pain in making these inquiries, dear Yolande; but I think I have a right to know that my brother conducted*

himself honourably ; for it was through us, you may remember, that he made your acquaintance ; and both Jim and I would consider ourselves in a measure responsible if he has behaved badly. But I daresay it is not so serious as that. I know he is impatient of worry ; and probably he has asked you to—well, I don't know what he could fairly ask ; and all I can say is that I hope, if matters are as he says, that he has done nothing to cause us reproach. You may well think that we shall both—I mean Jim and I—be exceedingly grieved if it is true ; for we both looked forward to having you as our sister and friend ; and you may depend on it that if there had been any *temporary* disagreement in one quarter, that would have been more than atoned for in the warmth of the welcome you would have got from us. Pray forgive me, dearest Yolande, for begging a line from you at your very earliest convenience ; it is not idle curiosity ; and I trust your answer will be that Archie's exaggeration only means that for a while he is leaving you to the duties that now occupy you, and that in time everything will be as it was. My best love to you, dearest Yolande, from your affectionate friend,

MARY GRAHAM."

"*P.S.*—Surely it *cannot* be true, or your father would have told me on the day of his leaving Allt-nam-ba ? Will you please write to Inverstroy."

Yolande remembered her promise to the Master of Lynn, and deemed it safest to say as little as possible. So she merely wrote—

"MY DEAR MARY—I hasten at once to say that your brother's conduct has been always and throughout most honourable ; and that in the breaking off of our engagement it has been even more—it has been most manly and generous. Pray have no fears on that head. As for the reasons, it is scarcely worth while explaining them when it is all over and gone now. Do you think you need tell me that you would have given me welcome in the Highlands?—indeed I have had experience of that already. I hope still to be your friend ; and perhaps some day, in the Highlands or elsewhere, we may be once more together ; in the meantime, please remember me most kindly to your husband, and believe me, yours affectionately,

YOLANDE WINTERBOURNE."

Yolande now seemed to consider that episode in her life as over and done with ; and set herself all the more assiduously to the service of her mother, who, poor woman, though she could not fail to see the greater cheerfulness and content of the girl, and probably herself derived some favourable influence from that, still remained in a weak and invalidish condition which prevented their migration to the south. However, something now occurred which stopped once and for all her recurrent entreaties that Yolande should go away to her own friends and leave her by herself. One day, as she was seated in her accustomed easy-chair, looking at the people, and the sea, and the ships, she suddenly uttered a slight exclamation, and then quickly rose and withdrew from the window.

"Yolande dear !" she exclaimed, in a voice of terror. "Yolande !"

"Yes, mother !" the girl answered, looking calmly up from her sewing.

And then she saw that her mother was strangely agitated ; and instantly she rose and caught her by the hand.

"What is it, mother?"

"I have seen that man that you know of—Romford."

"Well, what of that?" the girl said, quietly.

"But he was looking up at the house, Yolande !" said she, obviously in great alarm. "He must know that we are here. He must have sought us out."

"Very well ; and what of that?" said Yolande ; and she added, with a gentle touch of scorn : "Does he wish to be asked to have some tea with us ? I think we are not at home just now."

"But you don't understand, child—you don't understand," said the mother, with a kind of shiver. "To see him was to recall everything. I was in a dream ; and now it looks hideous to me ; and the thought of his coming here—and wishing to take me back to that life—when I did not care whether each day was to be the last——"

"My dear mother," said Yolande, "is it of much consequence what the gentleman wishes ? It is of more consequence what I wish. And that is that you are to remain with me."

"Oh yes, with you, Yolande—with you !" she exclaimed,

and she eagerly caught both hands of the girl and held them tight. "Always with you—always, always! I am not going away from you—I dare not go away. I have asked you to go to your friends, and leave me by myself; but I will not ask it again; I am afraid; if I were alone, he might come and speak to me—and—and persuade me that his wife was the one who best knew how to take care of me—oh, when I think of it, Yolande, it maddens me!"

"Then you need not think of it, mother dear," said the girl, pressing her to sit down. "Leave Mr. Romford to me. Oh, I will make him content with me, if he chooses to be troublesome. Do not fear."

"If he should come to the house, Yolande?"

"The ladies do not receive this afternoon," she answered, promptly, "nor to-morrow afternoon, nor the next day morning, nor any other time, when the gentleman calls whom you will describe to the landlady and her two girls and also to Jane. As for me, I scarcely saw him—I was too bewildered, and too anxious about you, mother; and then at last, when he did come near to me—*pouf!* away he went on the pavement. And as for him now, I do not care for him *that!*"—and she flicked her middle finger from the tip of her thumb.

"But he may speak to us on the street, child!"

"And if we do not wish to be spoken to, is there no protection?" said Yolande, proudly. "Come to the window, mother, and I will show you something."

"Oh no, no!" she said, shrinking back.

"Very well, then, I will tell you. Do you not know the good-natured policeman who told us when the harness was wrong at the shaft, and put it right for us? And if we say to him that we do not wish to have any of the gentleman's conversation, is it not enough?"

"I do not think I could go back now," the mother said, absently, as if she were looking over the life, or rather the living death, she had led. "I have seen you. I could not go back and forget you, and be a trouble to you and to your father. He must be a forgiving man to have let you come to me; and yet not wise. I was content; and those people were kind to me. Why should your life be sacrificed!"

"What a dreadful sacrifice, then!" exclaimed Yolande,

with a smile. "Look around—it is a dreadful sacrifice ! And when we are at Cannes, and at San Remo, and at Bordighera, it will be even more horrible and dreadful."

"But no, no, I cannot go back now," she said. "The sight of that man recalls everything to me. And yet they were kind to me. I could do as I pleased ; and it was all in a kind of dream. I seemed to be walking through the night always. And, indeed, I did not like the daytime—I liked to be in my own room, alone, in the evening—with newspapers and books—and it was a kind of half sleep with waking pictures—sometimes of you, Yolande—very often of you ; but not as you are now—and then they would come and torture me with telling me how badly I was treated in not being allowed to see you—and then—then I did not know what I did. It is terrible to think of——"

"Don't think of it, mother, then !——"

"It is all before me again," the wretched woman said, with a kind of despair. "I see what I have been—and what people have thought of me. How can I raise myself again ? It is no use trying ! My husband away from me—my friends ashamed to speak of me—my child throwing away her young life to no end—why should I try ?—I should be better away—anywhere—to hide myself and be no longer an injury and a shame——"

"Mother," said Yolande, firmly (for she had had to fight those fits of hopelessness before and knew the way of them well), "don't talk nonsense. I have undertaken to make you well ; and I have very nearly succeeded ; and I am not going to have my patient break down on my hands, and people say I am a bad doctor. I wonder what you would have said if I had called in a real doctor ?—to give you physic and all the rest of it ; whereas I get all kinds of nice things for you ; and take you out for drives and walks ; and never a word of medicine mentioned. And I don't think it is fair, when you are getting on so well, to let yourself drop into a fit of despondency ; for that will only make you worse, and give me so much longer trouble before I have you pulled through. For you are not going to shake me off—no—not at all !—and the sooner you are well, the sooner we are off to France and Italy ; and the longer you are not well, the longer it is you

keep me in Worthing, which perhaps you will not find so cheerful when the winter comes. Already it is cold ; some morning when you get up you will see—what ? nothing but snow ! everything white ! and then you will say it is time to fly ; and that is right ; but why not sooner ? ”

“ Well, to be beside you, Yolande,” said the mother, stroking the girl’s hand, “ is what I live for. If it were not for that, I should not care what happened.”

Yolande professed to treat this Mr. Romford as a person of little account ; but she was in her inmost heart a trifle more disquieted than outwardly she made believe. She shrewdly suspected that he was not the sort of gentleman to be disporting himself at a watering-place merely for amusement ; and she made no doubt that, somehow or other, he had found out their address, and had followed them hither in the hope of getting her mother once more under his control. As to that, she had no fear ; but, to make sure that he had no monetary or other claim that could warrant his even knocking at the door of the house, she resolved to write at once to Lawrence and Lang. The answer was prompt ; she got it by the first post next morning ; and it said that as “ our Mr. Lang,” by a fortunate accident, happened to be at the moment in Brighton, they had telegraphed to him to go along and see her ; consequently Miss Winterbourne might expect him to call on her during the course of the day.

This was far from being in accordance with Yolande’s wish ; but she could not now help it ; and so she went to her mother, and said that a gentleman would probably call that day with whom she wanted to have a few minutes’ private talk ; and would the mother kindly remain in her room for that time ?

“ Not—not Romford ? ” said she, in alarm.

“ I said a gentleman, mother,” Yolande answered.

And then a strange kind of glad light came into the mother’s face ; and she took her daughter’s hands in hers.

“ Can it be, then, Yolande ? There is one who is dear to you ? ”

The girl turned very pale for a second or so ; but she forced herself to laugh.

“ Nonsense, mother. The gentleman is calling on business.

It is very inconvenient ; but the firm told him to come along from Brighton ; and now I can't prevent him."

"I had hoped it was something more," said the mother, gently, as she turned to her book again.

Mr. Lang called about half-past twelve.

"I am very sorry you should have taken so much trouble about so small an affair," said Yolande.

"But you must understand, Miss Winterbourne," said the tall white-haired man, with the humorous smile and good-natured eyes, "that our firm are under the strictest injunctions to pay instant heed to the smallest things you ask of us. You have no idea how we have been lectured and admonished. But I grant you, this is nothing. The man is a worthless fellow, who is probably disappointed ; and he may hang about ; but you have nothing to fear from him. Everything has been paid ; we have a formal acquittance. I daresay the scoundrel got three times what was really owing to him ; but it was not a prodigious sum. Now, what do you want me to do ? I can't prosecute him for being in Worthing."

"No ; but what am *I* to do if he persists in speaking to my mother when we are out walking ?"

"Give him in charge. He'll depart quick enough. But I should say you had little to fear in that direction. Unless he has a chance of speaking to your mother alone, he is not likely to attempt it at all."

"And that he shall not have—I can take care of that," said Yolande with decision.

"You really need not trouble about it. Of course, if he found your mother in the hands of a stranger, what happened before might happen now—that is to say, he would go and try to talk her over—would say that she was never so happy as when he and his wife were waiting on her—that they were her real friends—and all that stuff. But I don't think he will tackle you," he added, with a friendly sort of smile.

"He shall not find my mother alone, at any rate," said Yolande.

"I hear everything is going on well ?" he ventured to say.

"I hope so—I think so," she answered.

"It was risky—I may say, it was a courageous thing for you to do ; but you had warm friends looking on."

She started, and looked up ; but he proceeded to something else.

"I suppose I may not see Mrs. Winterbourne ; or may I?"

"I think not," said Yolande. "It would only alarm her, or at least excite her ; and I am keeping all excitement away from her. And if you will excuse me, Mr. Lang, I will not keep her waiting. It is so kind of you to have come along from Brighton——"

"I dare not disobey such very strict orders," said he, with a smile, as he took up his hat and opened the door.

She did not ring the bell, however, for the maid-servant ; she said she would herself see him out, and she followed him downstairs. In the passage she said—

"I want you to tell me something, Mr. Lang. I want you to tell me who it was who explained to you what you were to do for me when I arrived in London—for I think I know."

"Then there can be no harm in telling you, my dear young lady. He called again on us, about a couple of weeks ago, on his way north ; and laid us under more stringent orders than ever. Mr. John Melville—was that your guess?"

"Yes," said Yolande, with her eyes downcast, but in perfectly calm tones. "I thought it was he. I suppose he was quite well when you saw him?"

"Oh yes, apparently, certainly."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lang—it is so kind of you to have taken all this trouble."

"Good-morning," said Mr. Lang, as he opened the door and went his way—and he also had his guess.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SNOW AND SUNLIGHT.

YOLANDE, however, was a strict and faithful guardian ; and Mr. Romford, no doubt finding it impossible to get speech of her mother alone, had probably left the place, for they saw no more of him. Indeed, they were thinking of other matters.

Yolande was anxious to get away to the south, and yet afraid to risk the fatigue of travelling on a system obviously so frail as her mother's was. She kept lingering on and on, in the hope of seeing some improvement taking place; but her mother, though much more cheerful in spirits, did not seem to gain in strength: indeed, she seemed physically so weak that again and again Yolande postponed their departure. This, also, had its drawbacks; for the weather was becoming more and more wintry; and out-of-door exercise was being restricted. It was too cold for driving; Yolande had sent back the pony-carriage. Then she dared not expose her mother to northerly or easterly winds; frequently now she had to go out for her morning walk by herself; a brisk promenade once or twice up and down the pier being enough to send her home with pink cheeks. At last she said to her mother, with some timidity—

"I have been thinking, mother, that we might take some one's advice as to whether you are strong enough to bear the journey."

"I think I could go," the mother said. "Oh yes, I should like to try, Yolande; for you seem so anxious about it; and of course Worthing must be dull for you."

The girl did not mind this reference to herself.

"I have been thinking how it could be most easily done, mother. I would get a carriage here, and have you nicely wrapped up from the cold, and we should drive to Newhaven; that would be more comfortable than the tedious railway journey round by Lewes. Then we should choose our own time of crossing when the sea was calm; and the railway journey from Dieppe to Paris is so much shorter than the Calais route. But to Marseilles—that is a terrible long journey——"

"I think I could do it, Yolande; I see you are so anxious to get away—and no wonder."

"I am anxious for your sake, mother. But I am afraid to take the responsibility. Would you mind my asking some one? Would you mind my taking some advice?"

"But you are the best doctor I have ever had," said the mother, with a smile. I would rather take your advice than any one's."

"But I am afraid, mother," she said. And then she added, cautiously, "It was not the advice of a doctor I was thinking of."

"Whose, then?"

The girl went and stood by her mother's side and put her hand gently on her shoulder.

Mother, my father is fretting that he can be of no service to us——"

"Oh no, no, no, Yolande!" the other cried, with a sudden terror. "Don't think of it, Yolande—it would kill me—he will never forgive me——"

"There is no forgiveness needed, mother; all that is over and forgotten. Mother——"

But the mere mention of this proposal seemed to have driven the poor woman into a kind of frenzy. She clung to her daughter's arm; and said in a wild sort of way—

"If I saw him, Yolande, I should think he was coming to take you away from me—to take you away from me!—it would be the old days come back again—and—and the lawyers——"

She was all trembling now, and clinging to the girl's arm.

"Stay with me, Yolande; stay with me! I know I have done great harm and injury; and I cannot ask him to forgive me; but you—I have not harmed you—I can look into your face without reproach——"

"I will stay with you, mother—don't be afraid. Now pray calm yourself; I won't speak of that again, if it troubles you; we shall be just by our two selves for as long as ever you like; and as for lawyers, and doctors, or anybody else, why, you shall not be allowed to know that they exist."

So she gradually got her mother calmed again; and by and by, when she got the opportunity, she sat down and wrote to her father, saying that at present it was impossible he should come and see them, for that the mere suggestion of such a thing had violently alarmed and excited her mother, and that excitement of any kind did her most serious mischief. She added that she feared she would have to take on her own shoulders the responsibility of deciding whether they should attempt the journey; that most likely they would try to proceed by short stages; and that, in that case, she would write

to him again for directions as to where they should go on arriving in Paris.

That indeed was what it came to ; although the girl naturally wished to share with some qualified person the responsibility of the decision. But now, as heretofore, whenever she hinted that they ought to call in a skilled physician, merely for a consultation, the mother betrayed such a nervous horror of the idea of seeing any stranger that the proposal had to be dropped.

"Why, Yolande, why?" she would say. "I am well enough—only a little weak. I shall be stronger by and by. What could you ask of a doctor?"

"Oh, well, mother," the girl said, rather vaguely, "one might leave it to himself to make suggestions. Perhaps he might be of some help—who knows? There are tonics, now, do you see, that might strengthen you—quinine, perhaps?—or——"

"No, no," said she, in rather a sad fashion. "I have done with drugs, Yolande. You shall be my doctor ; I don't want any one else. I am in your hands."

"It is too great a responsibility, mother."

"You mean to decide whether we leave Worthing?" said the mother, cheerfully. "Well, I will decide for you, Yolande. I say—let us go."

"We could go slowly—in short distances," the girl said, thoughtfully. "Waiting here or there for fine weather, do you see, mother? For example, we would not set out at this moment ; for the winds are boisterous and cold. And then, mother, if there is fatigue—if you are very tired with the journey, think of the long rest and idleness at Nice—and the soft air."

"Very well, Yolande ; whatever you do will be right. And I am ready to set out with you whenever you please."

Yolande now set about making final preparations for leaving England ; and amongst the first of these was the writing of a letter to Mrs. Bell. It was little more than a message of good-bye ; but still she intimated that she should be glad to hear how affairs were going on at Gress, and also what was being done about Monaglen. And she begged Mrs. Bell's acceptance of the accompanying bits of lace, which she had picked up at some charitable institution in

the neighbourhood, and which she thought would look nice on black silk.

The answer, which arrived speedily, was as follows :—

“ Gress, the 11th November.

“ MY DEAR YOUNG LADY—It was a great honour to me to receive the letter from you this morning, and a great pleasure to me to know that you are well, this leaving us all here in the same. Maybe I would have taken the liberty to write to you before now, but that I had not your address ; and Duncan, the keeper, was ignorant of it. And I had a mind to ask the Hon. Mrs. Graham, seeing her drive past one day, on her return ; but they glaiket lassies that were to have told me when they saw her come along the road again were forgetful, as usual, and so I missed the opportunity. My intention was to tell you about Monaglen, which you are so kind as to ask about. It is all settled now, and the land made over to its rightful possessor ; and I may say that when the Lord, in His good time, sees fit to take me, I will close my eyes in peace, knowing that I have done better with what was intrusted to me than otherwise might have happened. But in the meantime my mind is ill at ease, and I am not thankful for such mercies as have been vouchsafed me ; because I would fain have Mr. Melville informed of what has been done, and yet not a word dare I speak. At the best he is a by-ordinar proud, camstrary man ; but ever since he has come back this last time, he is more unsettled and distant like—not conversing with people as was his custom, but working at all kinds of hours, as if his life depended on they whigmaleeries ; and then, again, away over the hills and moors by himself, without even the pastime of fishing that used to occupy him. ’Deed, I tried once to tell him, but my brain got into a kind of whummle ; I could not get out a word ; and as he was like to think me an idiwt, I made some excuse about the school-laddies, and away he went. Howsever, what’s done cannot be undone. The lawyers vouch for that ; and a pretty penny they charged me. But Monaglen is his, to have and to hold—whether he will or no ; and the Melvilles have got their ain again, as the song says. And if any one tells me that I could have done better with the money, I will not gainsay them, for there are

wiser heads than mine in the world ; but I will say that I had the right to do what pleased myself with what belonged to me.

“Many’s the time I wish that I had an intervener, that would tell him of it, and take the task off my hands ; for I am sore afraid that did I do it myself, having little skill of argument or persuasion, he would just be off in a fluff, and no more to be said. For that matter, I might be content with things as they are, knowing that his father’s land would go to him when my earthly pilgrimage was come to an end ; but sometimes my heart is grieved for the poor lad, when I’m thinking that maybe he is working early and late, and worrying himself into a whey-faced condition, to secure a better future for himself, when the future is sure enough if he only kened. Besides that, I jalouse there’s a possibility of his going away again ; for I see there are bits of things that he put together on the day when you, dear young lady, left Allt-nam-ba, that he has not unpacked again ; and he has engaged the young lad Dalrymple at a permanent wage now, seeing that the chiel does very well with the school-bairns, though I envy not the mother that had to keep him in porridge when he was a laddie. Now that is how we are situate here, my dear young lady, since you have been so kind as to remember us ; and I would fain be asking a little more news about yourself if it was not making bold, for many’s the time I have wondered whether ye would come back again to Allt-nam-ba. It is a rough place for gentle-nurtured people, and but little companionship for a young lady ; but I heard tell the shooting was good ; and if the gentlemen are coming back, I hope you’ll no be kept away by the roughness of the place, for I’m sure I would like to have a glint of your face again. And I would say my thanks for the collar and cuffs in that beautiful fine lace, but indeed there is more in my heart than the tongue can speak. It is just too good of ye ; and although such things are far too fine for an old woman like me, still I’m thinking I’ll be putting them on next Sabbath morning, just to see if Mr. Melville will be asking if I have taken leave of my five senses. But he has not been familiar-like since his coming back, which is a sorrow to me, that must keep my tongue tied when I would fain speak.

“This is all at present, dear young lady, from your humble servant,

CHRISTINA BELL.”

For one breathless second it flashed across Yolande's brain that she would become the "intervener." Would it not be a friendly thing to do, as she was leaving England, to write and tell him, and to lay an injunction on him not to disappoint this kind creature's hopes? But then she turned away. The past was past. Her interests and duties were here. And so—with something of a sigh, perhaps—she took to the immediate business of getting ready for the journey; and had everything so prepared that they were ready to start at a moment's notice, whenever the weather was propitious.

And, indeed, they had fixed definitely the day of their departure when, on the very night before, the varying northerly winds that had been blowing with more or less of bitterness for some time culminated in a gale. It was an unusual quarter—most of the gales on that part of the coast coming from the south and the south-west; but all the same the wind during the night blew with the force of a hurricane, and the whole house shook and trembled. Then, in the morning, what was their astonishment to find the sunlight pouring in at the parlour windows; and outside, the world white and hushed under a sheet of dazzling snow! That is to say, as much of the world as was visible—the pavement, and the street, and the promenade, and the beach; beyond that the wind-ruffled bosom of the sea was dark and sullen in comparison with this brilliant white wonder lying all around. And still the northerly gale blew hard; and one after another strangely dark clouds were blown across the sky, until, as they got far enough to the south, the sun would shine through them with a strange coppery lustre, and then would disappear altogether, and the dark sea would become almost black. And then again the fierce wind would hurry on the smoke-coloured pall to the horizon; and there would be glimpses of a pale blue sky flecked with streaks of white; and the brilliant sunlight would be all around them once more, on the boats and the shingle and the railings and the snow-whitened streets.

Now Yolande's mother was strangely excited by the scene; for it confirmed her in a curious fancy she had formed that during all the time she had been under the influence of those drugs she had been living in a dream, and that she was now making the acquaintance again of the familiar features of the world as she once had known them.

"It seems years and years since I saw the snow," she said, looking on the shining white world in a mild entrancement of delight. "Oh, Yolande, I should like to see the falling snow—I should like to feel it on my hands."

"You are likely to see it soon enough, mother," said the girl, who had noticed how, from time to time, the thick clouds going over shrouded everything in an ominous gloom. "In the meantime, I shall go round, after breakfast, and tell Mr. Watherston not to send the carriage; we can't start in a snow-storm."

"But why not send Jane, Yolande? It will be bitterly cold outside."

"I suppose it will be no colder for me than for her," Yolande said; and then she added, with a smile of confession, "Besides, I want to see what everything looks like."

"Will you let me go with you? May I?" said the mother, wistfully.

"You?" said Yolande, laughing. "Yes, that is likely! That is very likely! You are in good condition to face a gale from the north-east and walk through snow at the same time!"

When Yolande went out she found it was bitterly cold, even though the terrace of houses sheltered her from the north-east wind. She walked quickly, and even with a kind of exhilaration, for this new thing in the world was a kind of excitement; and when she had gone and delivered her message, she thought she would have a turn or two up and down the pier, for there the snow had been in a measure swept from the planks and there was freer walking. Moreover, she had the whole promenade to herself; and when she got to the end, she could turn to find before her the spectacle of the long line of coast and the hills inland all whitened with the snow; while around her the sullen-hued sea seemed to shiver under the gusts of wind that swept down on it. Walking back was not so comfortable as walking out; nevertheless, she took another turn or two; for she knew that, if the snow began to fall, she might be imprisoned for the day; and she enjoyed all the natural delight of a sound constitution in brisk exercise. Besides, she had to walk smartly to withstand the cold; and the fight against the wind was something; altogether she remained on the pier longer than she had intended.

Then something touched her cheek, and stung her, as it were. She turned and looked—soft white flakes—a few of them only, but they were large—were coming fluttering along and past her; and here and there one alighted on her dress like a moth and hung there. It was strange; for the sunlight was shining all around her; and there were no very threatening clouds visible over the land. But they grew more and more frequent; they lit on her hair, and she shook them off; they lit on her eyelashes and melted moist and cold into her eyes; at length they had given a fairly white coating to the front of the dress; and so she made up her mind to make for home, through this bewilderment of snow and sunlight. It was a kind of fairy thing, as yet, and wonderful and beautiful; but she knew very well that as soon as the clouds had drifted over far enough to obscure the sun, it would look much less wonderful and supernatural, and she would merely be making her way through an ordinary, and somewhat heavy, fall of snow.

But when she got near to the house, something caught her eye there that filled her with a sudden dismay. Her mother was standing in the balcony; and she had her hands outstretched as if she were taking a childish delight in feeling the flakes fall on her fingers; and when she saw Yolande, she waved a pleased recognition to her. Yolande—sick at heart with dread—hurried to the door; ran upstairs when she got in; and rushed to the balcony. She was breathless; she could not speak; she could only seize her mother by the arm, and drag her into the room.

“Why, what is it, Yolande?” the mother said. “I saw you coming through the snow. Isn’t it beautiful—beautiful! It looks like dreams and pictures of long ago—I have not felt snow on my hands and my hair for so many and many years——”

“How could you be so imprudent, mother?” the girl said, when she had got breath. “And without a shawl! Where was Jane? To stand out in the snow——”

“It was only for a minute, Yolande,” said she, while the girl was dusting the snow from her mother’s shoulders and arms with her pocket-handkerchief. “It was only a minute—and it was so strange to see snow again.”

“But why did you go out?—why did you go out?” the girl

repeated. "On a bitterly cold morning like this—and bare-headed and bare-necked——"

"Well, yes, it is cold outside," she said, with an involuntary shiver. "I did not think it would be so cold. There, that will do, Yolande; I will sit down by the fire, and get warm again."

"What you ought to do is to have some hot brandy-and-water, and go to bed, and have extra blankets put over you," said Yolande, promptly.

"Oh no; I shall be warm again directly," said she, though she shivered slightly, as she got into the easy-chair by the fire, and began chafing her hands, which were red and cold with the wet snow. "It was too much of a temptation, Yolande—that is the fact. It was making the acquaintance of the snow again——"

"It was more like making the acquaintance of a bad cold," said Yolande, sharply.

However, she got some thick shawls, and put them round her mother, and the shivering soon ceased; she stirred up the fire, and brought her some illustrated papers; and then went away to get some things out again from the portmanteaus, for it was clearly no use thinking of travelling in this weather. It had settled down to snowing heavily; the skies were dark; there was no more of the fairy-land performance of the morning; and so Yolande set about making themselves as comfortable as possible within doors, leaving their future movements to be decided by such circumstances as should arise.

But during that evening Yolande's mother seemed somewhat depressed, and also a little bit feverish and uncomfortable.

"I should not wonder if you were going to have a very bad cold, mother," the girl said. "I should not wonder if you had caught a chill by going out on the balcony——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, child; it was only for a minute or so——"

"I wish you would take something hot before going to bed, mother. Port-wine-negus is good, is it not? I do not know. I have only heard. Or hot whisky-and-water? Mr. Shortlands had three tumblers of it after he fell into the Uisge-nan-Sithean, and had to walk the long distance home in wet clothes; and the rugs and shawls we had put on his bed—oh, it is impossible to tell the number."

"No, never mind, Yolande," the mother said. "I would rather not have any of these things. But I am a little tired. I think I will go to bed now; and perhaps Jane could ask for an extra blanket for me. You need not be alarmed. If I have caught a slight cold—well, you say we ought not to start in such weather in any case."

"Shall I come and read to you, mother?"

"No, no; why should you trouble? Besides, I am rather tired; most likely I shall go to sleep. Now I will leave you to your novel about the Riviera; and you must draw in your chair to the fire; and soon you will have forgotten that there is such a thing as snow."

And so they bade good-night to each other, and Yolande was not seriously disturbed.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A MEETING.

BUT next morning the mother was ill—nay, as Yolande in her first alarm imagined, seriously ill. She could hardly speak; her hands and forehead were hot and feverish; she would take nothing in the shape of breakfast; she only turned away her head languidly. Yolande was far too frightened to stay to consult her mother's nervous fancies or dislikes; a doctor was sent for instantly—the same doctor, in fact, who had been called in before. And when this portly, rubicund, placid person arrived, his mere presence in the room seemed to introduce a measure of calm into the atmosphere; and that was well. He was neither excited nor alarmed. He made the usual examination; asked a few questions; and gave some general and sufficiently sensible directions as to how the patient should be tended. And then he said he would write out a prescription—for this practitioner, in common with most of his kind, had retained that simple and serene faith in the efficacy of drugs which has survived centuries of conflicting theories, contradictions in fact, and scientific doubt, and which is perhaps more beneficial than otherwise to the human race so long as the quantities prescribed are so small as to do no

positive harm. It was aconite, this time, that he chose to experiment with.

However, when he followed Yolande into the other room, in order to get writing-materials, and when he sat down and began to talk to her, it was clear that he understood the nature of the case well enough; and he plainly intimated to her that, when a severe chill like this had caught the system and promised to produce a high state of fever, the result depended mainly on the power of the constitution to repel the attack and fight its way back to health.

"Now I suppose I may speak frankly to you, Miss Winterbourne," said he.

"Oh yes, why not?" said Yolande—who was far too anxious to care about formalities.

"You must remember, then, that though you have only seen me once before, I have seen you twice. The first time you were insensible. Now," said he, fixing his eyes on her, "on that occasion, I was told a little, but I guessed more. It was to frighten your mother out of the habit that you took your first dose of that patent medicine. May I assume that?"

"Well, yes," said Yolande, with downcast eyes—though, indeed, there was nothing to be ashamed of.

"Now I want you to tell me honestly whether you believe that warning had effect."

"Indeed, I am sure of it!" said Yolande, looking up, and speaking with decision.

"You think that since then she has not had recourse to any of those opiates?"

"I am positively certain of it!" Yolande said to him.

"I suppose being deprived of them cost the poor lady a struggle?" he asked.

"Yes, once or twice—but that was some time ago. Latterly she was growing ever so much more bright and cheerful; but still she was weak; and I was hesitating about risking the long journey to the south of France. Yes, it is I that am to blame. Why did I not go sooner? Why did I not go sooner?" she repeated, with tears coming into her eyes.

"Indeed you cannot blame yourself, Miss Winterbourne," the doctor said. "I have no doubt you acted for the best. The imprudence you tell me of might have happened anywhere.

If you keep the room warm and equable, your mother will do as well here as in the south of France—until it is safe for you to remove her——”

“But how soon, doctor?—how soon? Oh, when I get the chance again, I will not wait——”

“But you must wait—and you must be patient, and careful. It will not do to hurry matters. Your mother is not strong. The fight may be a long one. Now, Miss Winterbourne, you will send and get this prescription made up; and I will call again in the afternoon.”

Yolande went back to her mother's room, and sent away Jane; she herself would be nurse. On tiptoe she went about, doing what she thought would add to her mother's comfort; noiselessly tending the fire that had been lit, arranging a shutter so that less light should come in, and so forth, and so forth. But the confidence inspired by the presence of the doctor was gone now; a terrible anxiety had succeeded; and when at last she sat down in the silent room, and felt that she could do nothing more, a sense of helplessness, of loneliness, entirely overcame her, and she was ready to despair. Why had she not gone away sooner before this terrible thing happened? Why had she delayed? They might now have been walking happily together along some sunny promenade in the south—instead of this—this hushed and darkened room; and the poor invalid, whom she had tended so carefully, and who seemed to be emerging into a new life altogether, thus thrown back and rendered once more helpless. Why had she gone out on that fatal morning? Why had she left her mother alone? If she had been in the room, there would have been no venturing into the snow, whatever dreams and fancies were calling. If she had but taken courage and set out for the south a week sooner—a day sooner—this would not have happened; and it seemed so hard that when she had almost secured the emancipation of her mother—when the undertaking on which she had entered with so much of fear, and wonder, and hope, was near to being crowned with success—the work should be undone by so trifling an accident. She was like to despair.

But patience—patience—she said to herself. She had been warned, before she had left Scotland, that it was no light matter that lay before her. If she was thrown back into

prison, as it were, at this moment, the door would be opened some day. And, indeed, it was not of her own liberty she was thinking—it was the freedom of light and life and cheerfulness that she had hoped to secure for this stricken and hapless creature whom fortune had not over well treated.

Her mother stirred, and instantly she went to the bedside.

“What does the doctor say, Yolande?” she asked, apparently with some difficulty.

“Only what every one sees,” she said, with such cheerfulness as was possible. “You have caught a bad cold, and you are feverish; but you must do everything that we want you to do, and you will fight it off in time.”

“What kind of day is it outside?” she managed to ask again.

“It is fine, but cold. There has been some more snow in the night.”

“If you wish to go out, go out, Yolande. Don’t mind me.”

“But I am going to mind you, mother, and nobody else. Here I am, here I stay, till you are well again. You shall have no other nurse——”

“You will make yourself ill, Yolande. You must go out.”

She was evidently speaking with great difficulty.

“Hush, mother, hush!” the girl said. “I am going to stay with you. You should not talk any more—it pains you, does it not?”

“A little.” And then she turned away her head again.

“If I don’t speak to you, Yolande, don’t think it is unkind of me. I—I am not very well, I think.”

And so the room was given over to silence again, and the girl to anxious thoughts as to the future. She had resolved not to write to her father until she should know more definitely. She would not necessarily alarm him. At first, in her sudden alarm, she had thought of summoning him at once; but now she had determined to wait until the doctor had seen her mother again. If this were only a bad cold, and should show symptoms of disappearing, then she could send him a reassuring message. At present she was far too upset, and anxious, and disturbed, to carefully weigh her expressions.

About noon Jane stole silently into the room, and handed her a letter, and withdrew again. Yolande was startled when she glanced at the handwriting, and hastily opened the envelope.

The letter came from Inverness, and was dated the morning of the previous day : that was all she noted carefully—the rest seemed to swim into her consciousness all at once, she ran her eye over the successive lines so rapidly and with such a breathless agitation.

“MY DEAR YOLANDE,” Jack Melville wrote, “I shall reach Worthing just about the same time as this letter. I am coming to ask you for a single word. Archie Leslie has told me—quite casually, in a letter about other things—that you are no longer engaged to him ; and I have dared to indulge in some vague hopes—well, it is for you to tell me to put them aside for ever, or to let them remain, and see what the future has in store. That is all. I don’t wish to interfere with your duties of the moment—how should I?—but I cannot rest until I ascertain from yourself whether or no I may look forward to some distant time, and hope. I am coming on the chance of your not having left Worthing. Perhaps you may not have left ; and I beg of your kindness to let me see you for ever so short a time.”

She quickly and quietly went to the door, and opened it. Her face was very pale.

“Jane !”

The maid was standing at the window, looking out ; she immediately turned and came to her mistress.

“You remember Mr. Melville, who used to come to the lodge?”

“Oh yes, Miss.”

“He will be in Worthing to-day—he will call here—perhaps soon——”

She paused for a second, in this breathless despairing way of talking, as if not knowing what to say.

“He will ask to see me—well—you will tell him I cannot see him—I cannot see him. My mother is ill. Tell him I am sorry—but I cannot see him.”

“Oh yes, Miss,” said the girl, wondering at her young mistress’ agitation.

Then Yolande quietly slipped into the room again—glancing at her mother to see whether her absence had been noticed ;

and her hand was clutching the letter ; and her heart beating violently. It was too terrible that he should arrive at such a moment—amidst this alarm and anxiety. She could not bear the thought of meeting him. Already she experienced a sort of relief that she was in the sick-room again : that was her place ; there her duties lay. And so she sat in the still and darkened room, listening with a sort of dread for the ring at the bell below ; and then picturing to herself his going away ; and then thinking of the years to come, and perhaps his meeting her ; and she grew to fancy (while some tears were stealing down her cheeks) that very likely he would not know her again when he saw her, for she knew that already her face was more worn than it used to be, and the expression of the eyes changed. When she did hear the ring at the bell her heart leapt as if she had been shot ; but she breathed more freely when the door was shut again. She could imagine him walking along the pavement. Would he think her unkind ? Perhaps he would understand ? At all events, it was better that he was gone ; it was a relief to her ; and she went stealthily to the bedside to see whether her mother was asleep ; and now all her anxiety was that the doctor should make his appearance soon, and give her some words of cheer, so she should have no need to write to her father.

This was what happened when Melville came to the door. To begin with, he was not at all sure that he should find Yolande there : for he had heard from Mrs. Bell that she and her mother were leaving England. But when Jane, in response to his ringing of the bell, opened the door, then he knew that they were not gone.

“Miss Winterbourne is still here, then ?” he said, quickly—and, indeed, with some appearance of anxiety in the pale handsome face.

“Yes, sir.”

He paused for a second.

“Will you be good enough to ask her if I can see her for a moment ?” he said, at length. “She knows that I meant to call on her——”

“Please, sir, Miss Winterbourne told me to say that she was very sorry, but that she cannot see you.”

He seemed as one stupefied for a moment.

“Her mother is ill, sir,” said Jane.

"Oh," he said, a new light breaking in on him—for indeed that first blunt refusal, as uttered by the maid, was bewildering.

"Not very ill, is she?"

"Well, sir," said Jane, in the same stolid fashion; "I think she is very ill, sir; but I would not say so to my young mistress, sir."

"Of course not—of course not," he said, absently; and then he suddenly asked: "Has Miss Winterbourne sent for her father?"

"I think not, sir. I think she is waiting to hear what the doctor says."

"Who is the doctor?"

She gave him both the name and address.

"Thank you," said he. "I will not trouble Miss Winterbourne with any message." And with that he left.

But he sent her a message—some half-hour thereafter. It was merely this:—

"DEAR YOLANDE—I am deeply grieved to have intruded upon you at such a time. Forgive me. I hope to hear better news; but do not you trouble; I have made arrangements so that I shall know.—J. M."

And Yolande put that note with the other—for in truth she had carefully preserved every scrap of writing that he had ever sent her; and it was with a wistful kind of satisfaction that at least he had gone away her friend. It was something—nay, it was enough. If all that she wished for in the world could get as near to completion as this, then she would ask for nothing more.

The doctor did not arrive till nearly three o'clock; and she awaited his verdict with an anxiety amounting to distress. But he would say nothing definite. The fever had increased, certainly; but that was to be expected. She reported to him—as minutely as her agitation allowed—how his directions had been carried out in the interval; and he approved. Then he begged her not to be unduly alarmed, for this fever was the common attendant on the catching of a sudden chill; and with similar vague words of reassurance he left.

But the moment he had gone she sat down and wrote to her father. Fortunately Mr. Winterbourne happened at the moment to be in London; for he had come up to make

inquiries about some railway project that his constituents wished him to oppose next Session ; and he was at the hotel in Arlington Street that Yolande knew.

"DEAR PAPA," she said,—“We did not leave yesterday as I said we should ; for the weather was so severe I was afraid to take the risk. And now another thing has occurred ; my dear mother has caught a very bad cold, and is feverish with it, so that I have called in the doctor. I hope it will soon go away, and we be able to make the voyage that was contemplated. Alas ! it is a misfortune that there was any delay. Now, dear papa, you said that you were anxious to be of service to us ; and if your business in town is over, could you spare a few days to come and stay at a hotel in Worthing, merely that I may know you are there, which will reassure me, for I am nervous and anxious, and probably imagining danger when there is none. As for your coming here—no, that is not to be thought of ; it would agitate my dear mother beyond expression, and now more than ever we have to secure for her repose and quiet. Will it inconvenience you to come for a few days to a hotel ?—Your loving daughter,

“YOLANDE WINTERBOURNE.”

Mr. Winterbourne came down next morning—rather guessing that the matter was more serious than the girl had represented, and went straight to the house. He sent for Jane ; and got it arranged that, while she took Yolande's place in the sick-room for a few minutes, Yolande should come downstairs and see him in the ground-floor parlour, which was unoccupied. It is to be remembered that he had not seen his daughter since she left the Highlands.

When Yolande came into the room his eyes lighted up with gladness ; but the next minute they were dimmed with tears—and the hands that took hers were trembling—and he could hardly speak.

“Child, child,” said he, in a second or so, “how you are changed. You are not well, Yolande : have you been ill ?”

“Oh no, papa, I am perfectly well.”

The strange seriousness of her face !—where was the light-hearted child whose laugh used to be like a ray of sunlight ?

She led him to the window ; and she spoke in a low voice, so that no sound should carry.

"Papa, I want you to call on the doctor, and get his real opinion. It tortures me to think he may be concealing something ; I sit and imagine it ; sometimes I think he has not told me all the truth. I want to know the truth, papa. Will you ask him ?"

"Yes, yes, child—I will do whatever you want," said he, still holding her hand, and regarding her with all the old affection and admiration. "Ah, your face is changed a little, Yolande, but not much, not much—oh no, not much ; but your voice hasn't changed a bit—I have been wondering this many a day when I should hear you talking to me again——"

"Never mind about me, papa," said she, quickly. "I will give you the doctor's address. Which hotel are you staying at?"

He told her as she was writing the doctor's address for him on a card ; and then, with a hurried kiss, she was away again to the sick-room, and sending Jane down to open the door for him.

As Yolande had desired, he went and saw the doctor, who spoke more plainly to him than he had done to the girl of the possible danger of such an attack ; but also said that nothing could be definitely predicted as yet. It was a question of the strength of the constitution. Mr. Winterbourne told him frankly who he was, what his position was, and the whole sad story ; and the doctor perfectly agreed with Yolande that it was most unadvisable to risk the agitation likely to be produced if the poor woman were to be confronted with her husband. Any messages he might wish to send (in the event of her becoming worse) could be taken to her ; they might give her some mental rest and solace ; but for the present the knowledge of his being in Worthing was to be kept from her. And to this Mr. Winterbourne agreed ; though he would fain have seen a little more of Yolande. Many a time—indeed, every day—he walked up and down the promenade, despite the coldness of the weather, and always with the hope that he might catch some glint of her at the window, should she come for a moment to look at the outer world and the wide sea. Once or twice he did so catch sight of her ; and the day was brighter after that. It was like a lover.

As the days passed, the fever seemed to abate somewhat,

but an alarming prostration supervened. At length the doctor said, on one occasion, when Mr. Winterbourne had called on him for news—

“I think, Mr. Winterbourne, if you have no objection, I should like to have a consultation on this case. I am afraid there is some complication.”

“I hope you will have the best skill that London can afford,” said Mr. Winterbourne, anxiously; for although the doctor rather avoided looking him in the face, the sound of this phrase was ominous.

“Shall I ask Sir —— to come down?” he said, naming one of the most famous of the London physicians.

“By all means! And, whatever you do, don’t alarm my daughter!—try to keep her mind at rest—say it is a technical point—say anything—but don’t frighten *her*.”

“I will do my best,” the doctor promised; and he added: “I will say this for the young lady, that she has shown a devotion and a fortitude that I have never seen equalled in any sick-room; and I have been in practice now for two-and-thirty years.”

But all the skill in London or anywhere else could not have saved this poor victim from the fatal consequences of a few moments’ thoughtlessness. The wasted and enfeebled constitution had succumbed. But her brain remained clear; and as long as she could hold Yolande’s hand or even see the girl walking about the room, or seated in a chair, she was content.

“I don’t mind dying now,” she said, or rather whispered, on one occasion. “I have seen you, and known you; you have been with me for a while. It was like an angel that you came to me; it was an angel who sent you to me. I am ready to go now.”

“Mother, you must not talk like that!” the girl exclaimed. “Why, the nonsense of it! How long, then, do you expect me to be kept waiting for you, before we can start for Bordighera together?”

“We shall never be at Bordighera together,” the mother said, absently,—“never—never! But you may be, Yolande; and I hope you may be happy there, and always; for you deserve to be. Ah yes, you will be happy—surely it cannot be otherwise—you, so beautiful and so noble-hearted——”

And at last Yolande grew to fear the worst. One evening she had sent for her father; and she went downstairs and found him in the sitting-room.

"Yolande, you are as white as a ghost."

"Papa," said she, keeping a tight guard over herself, "I want you to come upstairs with me. I have told my mother you were coming. She will see you; she is grateful to you for the kind messages I have taken to her—I—I have not asked the doctors—but—I wish you to come with me—do not speak to her—it is only to see you that she wants——"

He followed her up the stairs; but he entered first into the room; and he went over to the bedside and took his wife's hand, without a word. The memories of a lifetime were before him as he regarded the emaciated cheek and the strangely large and brilliant eyes; but all the bitterness was over and gone now.

"George," said she, "I wished to make sure you had forgiven me, and to say good-bye. You have been mother as well as father to Yolande—she loves you—you—you will take care of her."

She closed her eyes, as if the effort to speak had overcome her; but he still held his wife's hand in his; and perhaps he was thinking of what had been, and of what—far otherwise—might have been.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ROME.

IT was in the month of January following, when the white thoroughfares of Rome were all shining clear in the morning sunlight, that Yolande Winterbourne stood in the spacious vestibule of the Hotel du Quirinal, waiting whilst her father read a letter that had just been given him. She was dressed in deep mourning; and perhaps that only heightened the contrast between the clearness and brightness of her English-looking complexion and ruddy-golden hair and the sallow foreign-looking faces around. And if the ordeal through which she had passed had altered her expression somewhat—if it had

robbed her for ever of the light laughter and the carelessness of her girlhood—it had left in their stead a sweet seriousness of womanhood that some people found lovable enough. It was not her father only who saw and was charmed by this grave gentleness of look, as an odd incident in this very hotel proved. At the time of the Winterbournes' arrival in Rome, there happened to be there—and also staying at the Quirinal Hotel—a famous French painter. Of course every one in the hotel knew who he was, and every one pretended not to know; for he seemed to wish to be alone; and he was so hard at work that when he came in for his mid-day meal—which was of the most frugal kind—he rarely spent more than ten or twelve minutes over it, and then he was off again, only pausing to light a cigarette in the corridor. Well, one day the Winterbournes went as usual into the winter-garden saloon of the hotel to have a bit of lunch, for they were going for a drive somewhere in the afternoon, and they were just about to sit down at their accustomed table, when the famous artist rose from his table and approached them. He was a little man, with a boyish face, but with careworn eyes; his manner was grave, and yet pleasant.

“Pardon me, sir, the liberty; but may I present myself to you?” said he, in the queerest of pronunciations—and he held a card between his finger and thumb.

“You do me a great honour, Monsieur,” said Mr. Winterbourne, with a low bow, and addressing him in his own tongue; and he managed dexterously to hint that Monsieur——had no need of a visiting-card with which to introduce himself.

Meanwhile Yolande had turned aside, under pretence of taking off her bonnet; and the great artist, without any circumlocution, told her father what was the object of his thus desiring to make their acquaintance. He was painting a religious subject, he said, which had great difficulties for him. He had observed Mademoiselle from time to time. She had so noble an air, an expression so tender, so Madonna-like. All that he wanted, if her father would grant the request, was to be permitted to sit at their table for a few minutes—to observe more closely, to find out what was that peculiar charm of expression. Would Monsieur forgive a painter, who could only plead that it was in the interest of his art that he made so bold a request.

Mr. Winterbourne not only gladly assented, but was greatly flattered to hear such praise of Yolande from so distinguished a man; and so she was immediately summoned, and introduced; and they all three sat down to the little table, and had their lunch together. Yolande was in happy ignorance that she was being studied or examined in any way whatever; and he took good care not to let her know. This little sad-eyed man proved a cheerful enough companion. He talked about anything and everything; and on one occasion Yolande had the happiness of being able to add to his knowledge. He was saying how the realistic decorations on the walls of this saloon—the blue skies, the crystal globes filled with swimming fish and suspended in mid-air, the painted balconies and shrubs and what not—would shock the severe theorists who maintain that in decoration natural objects should be represented only in a conventional manner; and he was saying that nevertheless this literal copying of things for the purposes of decoration had a respectable antiquity—as doubtless Mademoiselle had observed in the houses of Pompeii, where all kinds of tricks in perspective appeared on flat surfaces—and that it had a respectable authority—as doubtless Mademoiselle had observed in the Loggie, where Raphael had painted birds, beasts, or fishes, anything that came ready to his hand or his head, as faithfully and minutely as drawing and colour could reproduce them.

“I saw another thing than that at Pompeii,” said she, with a slight smile.

“Yes?” he said—and she did not know that all the time he was regarding the beautiful curve of the short upper lip, and observing how easily the slight pensive droop of it could be modulated into a more cheerful expression.

“I had always imagined,” said she, “that veneering and wickedness like that were quite modern inventions. Don’t they say so? Don’t they say that it is modern depravity that paints common wood to make it like oak, and paints plaster to resemble marble? But in Pompeii you will also find that wickedness—yes, I assure you, I found in more than one house beautiful black marble with yellow or white veins—so like real marble that one would not suspect—but if you examined it where it was broken you would find it was only plaster, or a soft graystone, painted over.”

“Indeed, Mademoiselle,” said he, laughing, “they were a wicked people who lived in Pompeii; but I did not know they did anything so dreadful as that.”

This was the beginning of an acquaintanceship that lasted during their stay in Rome; but was limited to this brief chat in the middle of the day; for the famous Frenchman was the most devoted of workers. And then when he heard that the Winterbournes were likely to leave Rome, he besought the father to allow Yolande to give two or three sittings to a young American artist, a friend of his, who was clever at pastels, and had a happy knack in catching a likeness. As it turned out that M.—— did not wish merely to procure a commission for his brother-artist, but wanted to have the sketch of the beautiful young English lady for himself, Mr. Winterbourne hesitated; but Yolande volunteered at once, and cheerfully; for they had already visited the young American’s studio, and been allowed to hunt through his very considerable collection of bric-à-brac—Eastern costumes, old armour, musical instruments, Moorish tiles, and the like. It was an amusement added to the occupations of the day. Besides, there was one of the most picturesque views in Rome from the windows of that lofty garret. And so Yolande sat contentedly, trying the strings of this or that fifteenth-century lute, while the young American was working away with his coloured chalks; and Mr. Winterbourne, having by accident discovered the existence, hitherto unsuspected, of a curious stiletto in the hollow handle of a Persian war-axe, now found an additional interest in rummaging among the old weapons which lay or hung everywhere about the studio.

And so we come back to the morning on which Yolande was standing at the entrance to the hotel, waiting for her father to read his letter. When he had ended, he came along briskly to her, and put his arm within hers.

“Now, Yolande,” said he, “do you think Mr. Meteyard could get that portrait of you finished off to-day? Bless my soul, it wasn’t to have been a portrait at all!—it was only to have been a sketch. And he has kept on niggling and niggling away at it—why? Well, I don’t know why—unless——”

But he did not utter the suspicion that had crossed his mind

once or twice. It was to the effect that Mr. Meteyard did not particularly want to finish the sketch ; but would rather have the young English lady continue her visits to his studio—where he always had a little nosegay of the choicest flowers awaiting her.

“What is the hurry, papa?” she said, lightly.

“Well, here is a letter from Shortlands. He has just started for Venice. If we are to meet him there we should start to-morrow for Florence. There isn’t much time left now before the opening of Parliament.”

“Then let us start to-morrow morning,” said she, promptly, “even if I have to sit the whole day to Mr. Meteyard. But I think this is the only time we have ever been in Rome without having driven out to the Baths of Carracalla.”

“I have no doubt,” said he, “that the Baths of Carracalla will last until our next visit. So come away, Yolande, and let’s hurry up Mr. Meteyard—‘yank him along,’ I believe, is the proper phrase.”

So they went out together, into the clear white sunlight.

“And here,” said he, discontentedly, as they were going along the street of the Quattro Fontane, “is Shortlands appointing to meet us in Venice at the —— Hotel. I’m not going to the —— Hotel : not a bit of it !”

“Why, papa, you know that is where Desdemona was buried !” she exclaimed.

“Don’t I know !” said he, with a gloomy sarcasm. “Can you be three minutes in the place without being perfectly convinced of the fact ! Oh yes, she was buried there, no doubt. But there was a little too much of the lady the last time we were there.”

“Papa, how can you say that !” she remonstrated. “It is no worse than the other ones. And the parapet along the Canal is so nice.”

“I’m going to Danieli’s,” he said, doggedly.

“I hope we shall get the same rooms we used to have, with the balcony,” said she ; “and then we shall see whether the pigeons have forgotten all I taught them. Do you remember how cunning they became in opening the little paper bags—and in searching for them all about the room ? Then I shouldn’t wonder if we were to see Mr. Leslie at Venice. In the last note I had from him, he said they were going there ;

but he seemed dissatisfied with his companion, and I do not know whether they are still together."

"Would you like to meet the Master at Venice?" said he, regarding her.

A trifle of colour appeared in her cheeks ; but she answered cheerfully—

"Oh yes, very much. It would be like a party of old times—Mr. Shortlands and he, and ourselves, all together."

"Shortlands has some wonderful project on hand—so he hints ; but he does not say what it is. But we must not attempt too much. I am afraid you and I are very lazy and idle travellers, Yolande."

"I am afraid so, papa."

"At all events," said he, as they were going down the steps of the Piazza di Spagna—which are no longer, alas ! adorned by picturesque groups of artists' models—"at all events, I must be back at the beginning of the Session. They say the Queen is going to open Parliament in person this year. Now there would be a sight for you ! That is a spectacle worth going to see."

"Ah," she said, with a quick interest, "am I to be allowed to go to the House of Commons after all ? Shall I hear you make a speech ? Shall I be in the grill—is it the grill they call it ?"

"No, no, you don't understand, Yolande !" said he. "It is the ceremony of opening Parliament. It is in the House of Lords ; and the Queen is in her robes ; and everybody you ever heard of in England is there—all in grand state. I should get you a ticket by hook or by crook, if I failed at the ballot ; I heard that one was sold for £40 the last time—but maybe that was romance. But I remember this for fact, that when Lord —— returned from abroad, and found every available ticket disposed of, and couldn't get one anyhow, he was in a desperate state because his wife insisted on seeing the show ; and when he went to an official, and said that, no matter how, Lady —— must and should be admitted, that blunt-spoken person told him that he might as well try to get her ladyship into the Kingdom of Heaven. But we'll manage it for you, Yolande. We'll take it in time. And if we can't secure it any other way, we'll get you into the Reporters' Gallery, as the representative of a ladies' newspaper."

When they had climbed up to the altitudes of the young artist's studio, which was situated in one of the narrower streets between the Piazza di Spagna and the Corso, they found Mr. Meteyard rather dismayed at the prospect of their leaving Rome so soon. It was not entirely a question of finishing the portrait. Oh yes, he said, he could get the sketch finished well enough—that is, as well as he was likely to be able to do it. But he had no idea that Mr. and Miss Winterbourne were going away so soon. Would they dine with him at his hotel that evening? He was coming to England soon; might he call and see them? And would Mr. Winterbourne take with him that Persian axe in the handle of which he had discovered the stiletto? And would Miss Winterbourne allow him to paint for her a replica of a study of a Roman girl's head that she seemed rather to like, and he would have it forwarded to England, and be very proud if she would accept it?

Alas! alas! this youth had been dreaming dreams; and no doubt that was the reason of his having dawdled so long over a mere sketch in crayons. But he was not wounded unto death. It is true, he covered himself with reproaches over the insufficiency of the portrait—although it was very cleverly done and an incontestably good likeness; and he gave them at his hotel that evening a banquet considerably beyond what a young painter is ordinarily supposed to be able to afford; and the next morning, although the train for Florence leaves early, there he was, with such a beautiful bouquet for the young lady! And he had brought her eau-de-cologne, too, for the journey, and fruit, and sweets (all this was ostensibly because he was grateful to her for having allowed him to make a sketch of her for his friend the famous French painter); and when at last the train went away out of the station he looked after it sadly enough. But he was not inconsolable, as events proved: for within three months of this sad parting he had married a rather middle-aged Contessa, who had estates near Terracina, and a family of four daughters by a former husband; and when the Winterbournes next saw him, he was travelling *en garçon* through the southern English counties, along with two Scotch artists, who also—in order that nothing should interfere with their impassioned study of Nature—had left their wives behind them.

CHAPTER L.

VENICE.

JOHN SHORTLANDS, however, was delayed by some business in Paris; and the Winterbournes arrived in Venice first. They went to Danieli's, and secured the rooms which were familiar to them in former days. But Yolande found that the pigeons had forgotten all she had ever taught them; and she had to begin again at the beginning—coaxing them first by sprinkling maize on the balustrade of the balcony: then inveigling them down into the balcony itself; then leaving the large windows open, and enticing them into the room; and finally educating them so that they would peck at any half-folded packet they found on the stone floor, and get at the grain inside. The weather happened to be fine; and father and daughter contentedly set about their water-pilgrimages through the wonderful and strange city that never seems to lose its interest and charm for even those who know it most familiarly, while it is the one thing in the world that is safe never to disappoint a new-comer, if he has an imagination superior to that of a hedgehog. There were several of Mr. Winterbourne's Parliamentary friends in Venice at this time; and Yolande was very eager to make their acquaintance; for now, with the prospect before her of being allowed to go down occasionally and listen to the debates, she wished to become as familiar as was possible with the *personnel* of the House. She could not honestly say that these legislators impressed her as being persons of extraordinary intellectual force; but they were pleasant enough companions. Some of them had a vein of facetiousness; while all of them showed a deep interest—and even sometimes a hot-headed partisanship—when the subject of cookery and the various *tables d'hôte* happened to come forward.

Then, one night when they had, as usual after dinner, gone round in their gondola to the hotel where Mr. Shortlands was expected, they found that that bulky north-countryman had arrived, and was now in the saloon, quite by himself, and engaged in attacking a substantial supper. A solid beefsteak and a large bottle of Bass did not seem quite in consonance

with a moonlight night in Venice ; but John Shortlands held to the " *cœlum, non animum* " theory ; and when he could get Dalescourt fare in Venice or anywhere else, he preferred that to any other. He received the Winterbournes with great cordiality ; and instantly they began a discussion of their plans for filling in the time before the opening of Parliament.

" But what is the great project you were so mysterious about ? " Mr. Winterbourne asked.

" Ay, there's something now," said he, pouring out another tumblerful of the clear amber fluid. " There's something worth talking about. I've taken a moor in Scotland for this next season ; and Yolande and you are to be my guests. Tit for tat's fair play. I got it settled just before I left London."

" Whereabouts is it ? " Mr. Winterbourne asked again.

" Well, when it's at home they call it Allt-nam-ba."

" You don't mean to say you've taken Allt-nam-ba for this year ? "

" But indeed I have. Tit for tat's fair play ; and, although the house won't be as well managed as it was last year—for we can't expect everything—still I hope we'll have as pleasant a time of it. Ay, my lass," said he, regarding Yolande, " you look as if a breath of mountain air would do ye some good—better than wandering about foreign towns, I'll be bound."

Yolande did not answer ; nor did she express any gratitude for so kind an invitation ; nor any gladness at the thought of returning to that home in the far mountain wilderness. She sat silent—perhaps also a trifle paler than usual—while the two men discussed the prospects of the coming season.

" I'll have to send Edwards and some of them up from Dalescourt ; though where they are to get beds for themselves I can't imagine," John Shortlands said. " Won't my fine gentleman turn up his nose if he has to take a room in the bothy ! By the way, my neighbour Walkley—you remember him, Winterbourne, don't ye?—has one o' those portable zinc houses that he bought some two or three years ago when he leased a salmon-river in Sutherlandshire. I know he hasn't used it since ; and I daresay he'd lend it to me. It could easily be put up behind the lodge at Allt-nam-ba ; and then they'd have no excuse for grumbling and growling."

" But why should you send up a lot of English servants,

who don't know what roughing it in a small shooting-box is like?" said Mr. Winterbourne. "Why should you bother? We did very well last year, didn't we? Why shouldn't you have exactly the same people—and here is Yolande, who can set the machine going again——"

"There you've exactly hit it," said Shortlands. "For that is precisely what Yolande is not going to do, and not going to be allowed to do. It's all very well for an inhuman father to let his daughter slave away at grocers' accounts. My guest is going to be my guest, and must have a clear full holiday as well as any of us. I don't say that she didn't do it very well—for I never saw a house better managed—everything punctual—everything well done—no breaking down—just what you wanted always to your hand—but I say that, this year, she must have her holiday like the rest. Perhaps she needs it more than any of us," he added, almost to himself.

It was strange that Yolande made no offer—however formal—of her services, and did not even thank him for his consideration. No; she sat mute; her eyes averted; she let these two discuss the matter between themselves.

"I am paying an additional £80," said Shortlands, "to have the sheep kept off; so that we may have a better chance at the deer. Fancy all that stretch of land only able to provide £80 of grazing. I wonder what some of the fellows on your side of the House, Winterbourne, would say to that. Gad, I'll tell you now what I'd like to see: I'd like to see the 666 members of the House of Commons put on to Allt-nam-ba, and compelled to get their living off it for five years."

"They wouldn't try," said his friend, contemptuously. "They'd only talk. One honourable member would make a speech three columns long to prove that it was the duty of the right honourable gentleman opposite to begin rolling off a few granite boulders; and the right honourable gentleman opposite would make a speech six columns long to show that there was no Parliamentary precedent for such a motion; and an Irishman would get up to show that any labour at all expended on a Scotch moor was an injury done to the Irish fisheries, and another reason why the Irish revenues should be managed by a committee of his countrymen meeting in Dublin. They'd talk the heather bare before they'd grow an ear of corn."

"By the way," said John Shortlands, who had now finished his supper and was ready to go outside and smoke a pipe in the balcony overlooking the Grand Canal, "I wonder if I shall be able to curry favour with that excellent person, Mrs. Bell."

"But why?" said Yolande, speaking for the first time since this Allt-nam-ba project was mentioned.

"Oh, that she might perhaps give Edwards and them a few directions when they go to get the place ready for us. I daresay they will find it awkward at first."

"I am sure Mrs. Bell will be very glad to do that," Yolande said at once. "If you like I will write to her when the time comes."

"She would do it for your sake, any way," he said. "Well, it will be odd if we should have just the same party in the evenings that we used to have last year. They were very snug those evenings—I suppose because we knew we were so far out of the world, and a small community by ourselves. I hope Jack Melville will still be there—my heart warmed to that fellow; he's got the right stuff in him, as we say in the north. And the Master—we must give the Master a turn on the hill—I have never seen his smart shooting that you talked so much about, Winterbourne. Wonder if he ever takes a walk up to the lodge. Should think it must be pretty cold up there just now; and cold enough at Lynn, for the matter of that."

But Mr. Leslie isn't at Lynn, is he?" said Yolande, suddenly.

"Where is he, then?"

"He had started on a yachting cruise when I last heard from him," Yolande said. "Why, we had half hoped to find him in Venice; and then it would have been strange—the Allt-nam-ba party all together again in Venice. But perhaps he is still at Naples—he spoke of going to Naples."

"I don't know about Naples," said Shortlands, "but he was in Inverness last week."

"In Inverness! No—it is impossible!"

"Oh, but it is certain. He wrote to me from Inverness about the taking of the shooting."

"Not from Lynn?" said Yolande, rather wonderingly.

"No. He said in his letter that he had happened to call in at Macpherson's office—that is their agent, you know—and

had seen the correspondence about the shooting ; and it was then that he suggested the advisability of keeping the sheep off Allt-nam-ba."

"It is strange," Yolande said, thoughtfully. "But he was not well satisfied with his companion—no—not at all comfortable in the yacht—and perhaps he went back suddenly."

And then she added—for she was obviously puzzled about this matter—

"Was he staying in Inverness?"

"Indeed I don't know," was the answer.

"Did he write from the Station Hotel?" she asked again, glancing at him.

"No ; he wrote from Macpherson's office, I think. You know he used often to go up to Inverness, to look after affairs."

"Yes," said Yolande, absently ; she was wondering whether it was possible that he still kept up that aimless feud with his relatives—aimless now that the occasion of it was for ever removed.

And then they went out on to the wide balcony, where the people were sitting at little tables, smoking cigarettes and sipping their coffee ; and all around was a cluster of gondolas that had been stopped by their occupants in going by, for in one of the gondolas, moored to the front of the balcony, was a party of three minstrels, and the clear, penetrating, fine-toned voice of a woman rose above the sounds of the violins and the guitar, with the old familiar

*Mare s'è placido,
Vento s'è caro
Scordar fa i triboli
Al marinaro*

—and beyond this dense cluster of boats—out on the pale waters of the canal—here and there a gondola glided noiselessly along, the golden star of its lamp moving swiftly ; and on the other side of the Canal the Church of Santa Maria della Salute thrust its heavy masses of shadow out into the white moonlight. They were well acquainted with this scene, and yet the wonder and charm of it never seemed to fade. There are certain things that repetition and familiarity do not affect—the strangeness of the dawn, for example, or the appearance of the first primrose in the woods ; and the sight of Venice in

moonlight is another of these things—for it is the most mysterious and the most beautiful picture that the world can show.

By and by the music ceased; there was a little collection of money for the performers; and then the golden stars of the gondolas stole away in their several directions over the placid waters. Mr. Winterbourne and Yolande summoned theirs also, for it was getting late; and presently they were gliding swiftly and silently through the still moonlight night.

"Papa," said Yolande, gently, "I hope you will go with Mr. Shortlands in the autumn, for it is very kind of him to ask you; but I would rather not go. Indeed, you must not ask me to go. But it will not matter to you; I shall not weary until you come back; I will stay in London, or wherever you like."

"Why don't you wish to go to Allt-nam-ba, Yolande?" said he.

There was no answer.

"I thought you were very happy up there," he said, regarding her.

But though the moonlight touched her face, her eyes were cast down, and he could not make out what she was thinking—perhaps even if her lips were tremulous he might have failed to notice.

"Yes," said she at length, and in a rather low voice, "perhaps I was. But I do not wish to go again. You will be kind and not ask me to go again, papa?"

"My dear child," said he, "I know more than you think—a great deal more than you think. Now I am going to ask you a question: if John Melville were to ask you to be his wife, would you then have any objection to going to Allt-nam-ba?"

She started back, and looked at him for a second, with an alarmed expression in her face; but the next moment she had dropped her eyes.

"You know you cannot expect me to answer such a question as that," she said, not without some touch of wounded pride.

"But he has asked you, Yolande," her father said, quietly. "There is a letter for you at the hotel. It is in my writing-case; it has been there for a month or six weeks; it was to be given you whenever—well, whenever I thought it most expedient to give it to you. And I don't see why you

shouldn't have it now—as soon as we go back to the hotel. And if you don't want to go to the Highlands for fear of meeting Jack Melville, as I imagine, here is a proposal that may put matters straight. Will it?"

Her head was still held down, and she said in almost an inaudible voice—

"Would you approve, papa?"

"Nay, I'm not going to interfere again!" said he, with a laugh. "Choose for yourself. I know more now than I did. I have had some matters explained to me, and I have guessed at others; and I have a letter, too, from the Master—a very frank and honest letter, and saying all sorts of nice things about you too, Yolande—yes, and about Melville, too, for the matter of that—I am glad there will be no ill-feeling, whatever happens. So you must choose for yourself, child, without let or hindrance—whatever you think is most for your happiness—what you most wish for yourself—that is what I approve of——"

"But would you not rather that I remained with you, papa?" she said, though she had not yet courage to raise her eyes.

"Oh, I have had enough of you, you baggage!" he said, good-naturedly. "Do you expect me always to keep dragging you with me about Europe? Haven't we discussed all that before? Nay, but Yolande," he added, in another manner, "follow what your own heart tells you to do. That will be your safest guide."

They reached the hotel, and when they ascended to their suite of rooms he brought her the letter. She read it—carefully and yet eagerly, and with a flushed forehead and a beating heart—while he lit a cigarette and went to the window, to look over at the moonlit walls and massive shadows of San Giorgio. There was a kind of joy in her face, but she did not look up. She read the letter again—and again; studying the phrases of it; and always with a warmth at her heart—of pride and gratitude, and a desire to say something to some one who was far away.

"Well?" her father said, coming back from the window, and appearing to take matters very coolly.

She went to him, and kissed him, and hid her face in his breast.

"I think, papa," said she, "I—I think I will go with you to Allt-nam-ba."

CHAPTER LI.

CONCLUSION.

Now it is not possible to wind up this history in the approved fashion, because the events chronicled in it are of somewhat recent occurrence—indeed, at the present writing the Winterbournes and John Shortlands are still looking forward to their flight to Allt-nam-ba, when Parliament has ceased talking for the year. But at least the story may be brought as far as possible "up to date." And first, as regards the Master of Lynn. When, on that evening in Venice, Yolande had imagined that he was in Naples, and John Shortlands had affirmed that he was in Inverness, he was neither in one nor the other. He was in an hotel in Princes Street, Edinburgh, in a sitting-room on the first floor, lying extended on a sofa, and smoking a big cigar, while a cup of coffee that had been brought him by affectionate hands stood on a small table just beside him. And Shena Vân, having in vain cudgelled her brains for fitting terms of explanation and apology, which she wished to send to her brother, the Professor, had risen from the writing-desk, and gone to the window; and was now standing there contemplating the wonderful panorama without—the Scott monument touched with the moonlight, the deep shadows in the valley, the ranges of red windows in the tall houses beyond, and the giant bulk of the Castle-hill reaching away up into the clear skies.

"Shena," says he, "what o'clock is it?"

"A quarter past nine," she answers, dutifully, with a glance at the clock on the chimneypiece.

"Capital!" he says, with a kind of sardonic laugh. "Excellent! A quarter past nine. Don't you feel a slight vibration, Shena, as if the earth were going to blow up? I wonder you don't tremble to think of the explosion!"

"Oh yes, there will be plenty of noise," says Shena Vân, contentedly.

"And what a stroke of luck to have the Grahams at Lynn!

Bagging the whole covey with one cartridge ! It will soon be twenty past. I can see the whole thing. They haven't left the dining-room yet ; his lordship must always open the newspapers himself ; and the women-folk keep on, to hear whether Queen Anne has come alive or not. Twenty past, isn't it ? ' Hang that fellow, Lammer ! ' his lordship growls. ' He's always late. Drinking whisky at Whitebridge, I suppose. I'll send him about his business—that's what it'll come to.' Then his lordship has another half-glass of port-wine ; and Polly thinks she'll run upstairs for a minute to see that the blessed Baby is all right ; and we'll say she's at the door when they hear wheels outside, and so she stands and waits for the letters and papers. All right ; don't be in a hurry, Polly : you'll get something to talk about presently."

He raised himself and sat up on the sofa, so as to get a glimpse of the clock opposite ; and Shena Ván—whose proper title by this time was Janet Leslie—came and stood by him, and put her hand on his shoulder.

" Will they be very angry, Archie ? " she says.

He had his eye fixed on the clock.

" By Jove," he says, " I wish I was one of those fellows who write for the stage ; I would tell you what's happening at this very minute, Shena ! I can see the whole thing—Polly gets the letters and papers, and goes back—' Papa, here is a letter from Archie—from Edinburgh—what is he doing in Edinburgh ? ' And then his papaship opens the letter—' My dear father I have the honour to inform you '—' What ! ' he roars—like a stag lost in the mist. Why, don't you hear them, Shena ?—they're all at it now—their tongues going like wild-fire—Aunty Tab swearing she knew it would come to this—I was never under proper government, and all the rest—Polly rather inclined to say it serves them right, but rather afraid—Graham suggesting that they'd better make the best of it, now it couldn't be helped——"

" Oh, do you think he'll say that, Archie ? " said she, anxiously. " Do you think he'll be on our side ? "

" My dear girl," said he, " I don't care the fifteenth part of a brass farthing which of them, or whether any one of them, is on our side. Not a bit. It's done. Indeed, I hope they'll howl and squawk to their hearts' content. I should be sorry if they didn't."

"But you know, Archie," said Shena Vân—who had her own little share of worldly wisdom, "if you don't get reconciled with your friends, people will say that you only got married out of spite."

"Well, let them," said he, cheerfully. "You and I know better, Shena—what matters it what they say? I know what Jack Melville will say. They won't get much comfort out of *him*. 'No one has got two lives; why shouldn't he make the most of the one he's got; why shouldn't he marry the girl he's fond of?'—that's about all they'll get out of him. Polly needn't try to throw the Corrievreak fly over him. Well now, Shena, when one thinks of it, what strange creatures people are. There's Corrievreak; it's a substantial thing; it's worth a heap of solid money, and it might be made worth more; and there it was, offered to our family, you may say, to keep in our possession perhaps for centuries. And what interfered? Why, an impalpable thing like politics! Opinions—things you couldn't touch with your ten fingers if you tried a month—a mere prejudice on the part of my father—and these solid advantages are thrust away. Isn't it odd?"

The abstract question had no interest for Shena Vân.

"I hope you do not regret it," she said, rather proudly.

"Do I speak as if I regretted it? No; not much! It was that trip to Carlisle that did it, Shena, that showed me what was the right thing to do. And after you left wasn't I wild that I had not had more courage. And then Owley became more and more intolerable—but I daresay you were the cause of it, you know, in part—and then I said to myself, 'Well, I'm off to Aberdeen; and if Shena has any kind of recollection of the old days in her heart, why, I'll ask her to settle the thing at once——'"

"Yes, but why wouldn't you let me tell my brother?" Shena Vân pleaded.

"Telling one would have been telling everybody," said he, promptly, "and they would have been at their old games. Now, you see, it isn't of the least consequence what they do or say—if they tear their hair out it'll only hurt their own heads. And I don't see why you should worry about that letter. Why should you make apologies? Why should you pretend to be sorry—when you're not? If it bothers you to write the letter, send a copy of

this morning's *Scotsman* ; that's quite enough. Send them all this morning's *Scotsman* ; and you needn't mark it ; it will be all the pleasanter surprise for them. When they've finished with the leading articles, and the news, and the criticisms of the picture-exhibitions, and when they've looked to see how many more ministers of the gospel have been writing letters and quarrelling like Kilkenny cats, then they'll stray on to a nice little paragraph—'What?—*St. Giles's Church—Archibald Leslie to Janet Stewart—oh, snakes!*'"

"But you wrote to your people, Archie," Shena Vân said—looking wistfully at the sheet of note-paper that she had in vain endeavoured to fill with apologies and appeals for pardon.

"Well, yes, I did," the Master of Lynn admitted, with a peculiar smile. "I could not resist the temptation. But you mistake altogether, Shena, if you imagine that it was to make apology that I wrote. Oh no ; it was not that ; it was only to convey information. It was my filial duty that prompted me to write. Besides I wished the joyful tidings to reach Auntie Tabby as soon as possible—oh don't you make any mistake, Shena—she's worth a little consideration—she has a little money of her own—oh yes, she may do something for us yet!"

"I don't like to hear you talk of your relations in that way, Archie," said Shena Vân, rather sadly, "for if you think of them like that, how are you ever to be reconciled to them? And you told me it would be all right."

"And so it will, my dear girl," said he, good-naturedly. "And this is the only way to put it all right. When they see that the thing is done, then they'll come to their senses. Polly will be the first. She always makes the best of matters—she's a good little soul. And his lordship won't do anything desperate ; he won't be such a fool as to drive me to raise money on my expectations ; and he'll soon be glad enough to have me back at Lynn—the people there want some looking after, as he knows. Besides, he ought to be in a good humour just now—both the forest and Allt-nam-ba let already, and Arden-greanan as good as taken."

"But I must write—I must write," said Shena, regarding the paper again.

"Well, it's quite simple," said he. "Tell your brother that, when you left Aberdeen, instead of going either to Inverness

or to Strathaylort, you came here to Edinburgh, and were married, as per inclosed cutting from the *Scotsman*. The cause?—urgent family reasons, which will be explained. Then you ask him to be good enough to communicate this news to your sister, and also to send a message to the Manse; but as for apologising, or anything of that kind, I'd see them hanged first. Besides, it isn't good policy. It isn't wise to treat your relatives like that, and lead them to think they have a right to remonstrate with you. It's your business; not theirs. You have quite arrived at years of discretion, my darling Shena; and if you don't want people to be for ever jumping on you—that is, metaphorically, I mean—stop it at the beginning, and with decision. Here,” said he, suddenly getting up and going over to the writing-table, “I'll write the letter for you!”

“Oh no, Archie!” she cried, interposing. “You will only make them angry.”

“My dear child,” said he, pushing her away, “honey and molasses are a fool to what I can write when I want to be civil; and at the present moment I should like to shake hands with the whole human race.”

So he wrote the letter, and wrote it very civilly, too, and to Shena's complete satisfaction; and then he said, as he finished his coffee—

“I don't think we shall stay long in Paris, Shena. I don't like Paris. You won't find it half as fine a town to look at as this is now. And if you go to the theatre, its all *spectacle* and ballet; or else it's the story of a married woman running away with a lover; and that isn't the kind of thing you ought to see on your wedding trip, is it? There's no saying how far the force of example might go; and you see you began your wedded life by running away——”

“It was none of my doing, Archie,” said Shena Vàn, quickly.

“No,” said he. “I think we'll come back to London soon; for everybody will be there at the opening of the Session; and I want to introduce you to some friends of mine. Jack Melville says he is going up; and he pretends it's about his Electric Lighting performance; but I suspect it's more to meet the Winterbournes, when they come back from abroad, than to see the Directors of the Company. If they do adopt

his system, I hope he'll make them fork out, for he is not overburdened with the gear of this wicked world any more than myself—faith, I wish my right honourable papa would hand along the cost of that Special License, for it was all his doing. But never mind, Shena: we'll tide along somehow; and when we come back from our trip, if they are still showing their teeth, like a badger in a hole, I know what I'll do—we'll go over to the West of Ireland, for the Spring salmon-fishing, and we can live cheaply enough in one of the hotels there, either on the Shannon or out in Connemara. How would you like that?"

"Oh, I should be delighted!" said Shena Vân, with the dark, wonderful blue eyes filled with pleasure. "For I'm afraid to go back to Inverness, and that's the truth, Archie."

"Oh, but we shall have to go back to Inverness, all in good time," said he, "and it won't do to be afraid of anything. And I think you'll hold your own, Shena," he added, approvingly. "I think you'll hold your own."

And so at this point we may bid good-bye to these adventurers (who seemed pleased enough with such fortune as had befallen them), and come along to another couple who, a few weeks later, were walking one evening on the terrace of the House of Commons. It was a dusky and misty night, though it was mild for that time of the year; the heavens were overclouded; the lights on Westminster Bridge and on the Embankment did little to dispel the prevailing gloom, though the quivering golden reflections on the black river looked picturesque enough; and in this dense obscurity such Members and their friends as had come out from the heated atmosphere of the House to have a chat or a cigar on the terrace were only indistinguishable figures who could not easily be recognised. They for the most part were seated on one or other of the benches standing about, or idly leaning against the parapet; but these two kept walking up and down in front of the vast and shadowy building and the gloomy windows, and they were arm-in-arm.

"A generation hence," said one of them, looking at the murky scene all around them, "Londoners won't believe that their city could ever have been as black a pit as this is."

"But this generation will see the change, will it not?" said

his companion, whose voice had just a trace of foreign accent in it. "You are going to make the transformation, are you not?"

"I?" said he, laughing. "I don't know how many are all trying at it; and whoever succeeds in getting what is really wanted will be a wonder-worker, I can tell you. What's more, he will be a very rich man. You don't seem to think about that, Yolande."

"About what, then?"

"Why, that you are going to marry a very poor man."

"No, I do not care at all," she said, or rather what she did say was, "I do not care aytall"—despite the tuition of her father.

"That is because you don't understand what it means," said he, in a kindly way. "You have had no possibility of knowing. You can't have any knowledge of what it is to have a limited income—to have to watch small economies, and the like——"

"Ah, indeed, then!" said she. "And my papa always angry with me for my economies, and the care and the thrift that the ladies at the Château exercised always! 'Miser,' he says to me, 'Miser that you are!' Oh, I am not afraid of being poor—not aytall!"

"I have a chance," he said, absently. "So far, indeed, I have been lucky. And the public are hanging back just now; they have seen so many bad experiments that they won't rush at any one system without examining the others; it's the best one that will win in the end. But it is only a chance, after all. Yolande," said he, "I wonder if I was born to be your evil genius. It was I who sent you away from your own home—where you were happy enough; and you must have suffered a terrible anxiety all that time—I can see the change in you——"

"Oh, but I will not have you speak like that," said she, putting her other hand on his arm. "How can you speak like that to me when it is night and day that I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you. Yes; it was you who sent me; if I had not loved you before, I should love you for that now—with my whole heart. If you had known—if you had seen—what joy it was to my poor mother that I was with her for that time—that we were together—and she happy and cheerful for the first time for many, many sad years—if you had seen the gladness in

her face every morning when she saw me—then perhaps you would have understood. And if I had not gone to her—if I had never known her—if she had never had that little happiness—would that not have been a sad thing? That she might have died among strangers—and I, her own daughter, amusing myself with friends and idleness and pleasure somewhere—it is too terrible to think of! And who prevented that? It is not my gratitude only; it is hers also that I give you, that I offer you; you made her happy for a time when she had need of some kindness; and you cannot expect that I shall forget it.”

“You are too generous,” he said. “It is a small matter to offer advice. *I* sacrificed nothing; the burden of it fell on you. But I will be honest with you. I guessed that you would have anxiety and trouble; but I knew you would be brave enough to face it; and I knew, too, that you would not afterwards regret whatever you might have come through; and I know that you don’t regret it now. I know you well enough for that.”

“And some day,” she said, “or perhaps through many and many years, I will try to show you what value I put on your opinion of me, and if I do not always deserve that you think well of me, at least I shall try to deserve it—can I promise more?”

At this moment John Shortlands made his appearance; he had come out from the smoking-room, with a cigar in his mouth.

“Look here, Yolande,” said he. “I suppose you don’t want to hear any more of the debate?”

“No, no,” she said, quickly. “It is stupid—stupid. Why do they not say what they mean at once—not stumbling here, stumbling there, and all the others talking amongst themselves, and as if everybody were going asleep——”

“It’s lively enough sometimes, I can assure you,” he said. “However, your father thinks it’s no use your waiting any longer. He’s determined to wait until the division is taken; and no one knows now when it will be. He says you’d better go back to your hotel—I suppose Mr. Melville will see you so far. Well,” said he, addressing Jack Melville, “what do you think of the dinner Winterbourne got for you?”

“I wasn’t thinking of it much,” Jack Melville said. “I was more interested in the Members. I haven’t been near the

House of Commons since I used to come up from Oxford for the boat-race."

"How's the Company going?"

"Pretty well, I think; but of course I've nothing to do with that. I have no capital to invest."

"Except brains; and sometimes that's as good as bank-notes. Well," said Shortlands, probably remembering an adage about the proper number for company, "I'll bid ye good-night—for I'm going back to the mangle—I may take a turn at it myself."

So Jack Melville and Yolande together set out to find their way through the corridors of the House out into the night-world of London; and when they were in Palace Yard Yolande said she would just as soon walk up to the hotel where her father and herself were staying, for it was no farther away than Albemarle Street.

"Did you hear what Mr. Shortlands said?" she asked, brightly. "Perhaps, after all, then, there is to be no romance? I am not to be like the heroine of a book, who is approved because she marries a poor man? I am not to make any such noble sacrifice?"

"Don't be too sure, Yolande," said he, good-naturedly. "Companies are kittle cattle to deal with; and an inventor's business is still more uncertain. There is a chance, as I say; but it is only a chance. However, if that fails, there will be something else. I am not afraid."

"And I—am I afraid?" she said, lightly. "No! Because I know more than you—oh, yes, a great deal more than you. And perhaps I should not speak; for it is a secret—no, no, it is not a secret, for you have guessed it—do you not know that you have Monaglen?"

He glanced at her to see whether she was merely making fun; but he saw in her eyes that she was making an actual—if amused—inquiry.

"Well, Yolande," said he, "of course I know of Mrs. Bell's fantasy; but I don't choose to build my calculations for the future on a fantasy——"

"But," said Yolande, rather shyly, "if you were told it was done? If Monaglen were already yours? If the lawyers had done—oh, everything—all settled—what then?"

"What then? I would refuse to take it. But it is absurd. Mrs. Bell cannot be such a madwoman. I know she is a very kind woman; and there is in her nature a sort of romantic attachment to my father's family—which I rather imagine she has cultivated by the reading of those old songs. Still she cannot have done anything so wild as that."

"She has bought Monaglen," Yolande said, without looking up.

"Very well. I thought she would do *that*—if she heard it was in the market. Very well. Why shouldn't she go there—and send for her relatives, if she has any—and be a grand lady there? I have met more than one grand lady who hadn't half her natural grace of manner, nor half her kindness of heart."

"It is very sad, then," said Yolande (who was afraid to drive him into a more decided and definite opposition). "Here is a poor woman who has the one noble ideal—the dream of her life—it has been her hope and her pleasure for many and many a year; and when it comes near to completion—no—there is an obstacle—and the last obstacle that one could have imagined! Ah, the ingratitude of it! It has been her romance; it has been the charm of her life. She has no husband, no children. She has, I think, not any relation left. And because you are proud, you do not care that you disappoint her of the one hope of her life—that you break her heart?"

"Ah, Yolande," said he, with a smile, "Mrs. Bell has got hold of you with her old Scotch songs—she has been walking you through fairyland, and your reason has got perverted. What do you think people would say if I were to take away this poor woman's money from her relatives—or from her friends and acquaintances, if she has no relatives? It is too absurd. If I were the promoter of a swindling company, now, I could sharp it out of her that way; that would be all right, and I should remain an honoured member of society; but this won't do; this won't do at all. You may be as dishonest as you like, and so long as you don't give the law a grip on you, and so long as you keep rich enough, you can have plenty of public respect; but you can't afford to become ridiculous. No, no, Yolande; if Mrs. Bell has bought Monaglen, let her

keep it ; I hope she will install herself there, and play Lady Bountiful—she can do that naturally enough ; and when she has had her will of it, then, if she likes to leave it to me at her death, I shall be her obliged and humble servant. But in the meantime, my dearest Yolande, as you and I have got to face the world together, I think we'd better have as little fantasy around us as possible—except the fantasy of affection, and the more of that we have the better.”

When they got to the hotel, they paused outside the glass-door to say good-bye.

“Good-night, dearest Yolande.”

“Good-night, dear Jack.”

And then she looked up at this broad-shouldered, pale, dark man, and there was a curious smile in her beautiful, sweet, and serious face.

“Is it true,” she asked, “that a woman always has her own way?”

“They say so, at all events,” was the answer.

“And if two women have the same wish and the same hope, and only one man to say no, then it is still more likely he will be defeated?”

“I shouldn’t say he had much chance myself,” Jack Melville said ; “but what’s your conundrum, now, sweetheart?”

“Then I foresee something,” she said. “Yes, I see that we shall have to ask Mr. Leslie to be very kind, and to lend us Duncan Macdonald for an evening. Oh, not so very far away—not so far away as you imagine ; because, you know, when we have all gone up to Monaglen House, and we are all inside, going over the rooms—and looking here and there with a great curiosity and interest—or perhaps we are all seated in the dining-room, having a little chat together—then what will you say if all at once you heard the pipes outside, and what do you think Duncan will play, on such an evening as that if not *Melville’s Welcome Home* ?”

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